

***City, war and geopolitics:
the relations between militia political violence
and the built environment of Beirut
in the early phases of the Lebanese civil war
(1975-1976)***

Sara Fregonese

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Thesis abstract

The thesis deals with the relationships between political violence and the built environment of Beirut during the early phases of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1976). It investigates how the daily practices of urban warfare and the urban built fabric impacted on each other, and specifically how the violent targeting of the built fabric relates to contested discourses of power and identity enacted by the urban militias. The study is the result of residential fieldwork in Beirut, where I held in-depth interviews with former militia combatants, media representatives, academics and practitioners in urban studies and architecture, as well as conducting archival search into bibliographical, visual and microfilm sources in Arabic, English and French. Official geopolitical discourses in international diplomacy about the civil war between 1975 and 1976 focused on nation-state territoriality, and overlooked a number of complex specifications of a predominantly urban conflict. This led occasionally to an oversimplification of the war and of Beirut as chaos. Reading the official discourses side by side with unofficial militia accounts, I argue instead that state and non-state narratives coexisted in the urban warfare, and their intermingling produced geographical specifications that were particularly visible in the built environment. Both official and unofficial accounts were permeated of colonial references to the sectarian structure of the Lebanese society. In the thesis, I adopt a discursive and post-colonial approach to these references. Beirut's built fabric became a contested site where the militias enacted different visions of the same territorial discourse: the nation state of Lebanon. This enactment took place through the occupation, division and destruction of portions of the city. Beirut's built environment played a central role in actively shaping and giving materiality to contested ideas of territory, identity, and security. Therefore, the thesis offers a resourceful and critical approach to the study of the impact of conflict on everyday city life.

To Beirut

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents, who always trusted and empowered me to pursue my goals.

I am grateful to Claudio Minca, my supervisor and mentor since the Venice days. He taught me how to think geographically. Without him and his trust in 'natural born geographers', I would not have had embarked on my UK academic adventure. Claudio and Luiza Bialasiewicz also helped to make Newcastle a home away from home.

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This work ended when an unexpectedly violent round of street-to-street fighting began in Beirut on 7 May 2008, in those same neighbourhoods where I lived during my research fieldwork. During four months in 2005, I benefited of a series of Beirut-based social networks which facilitated my research. I would like to thank the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies and the personnel of the Jafet Library at the American University of Beirut. I would also like to thank all anonymous participants, interviewees, and all the friends and neighbours of Ras el Naba in Beirut who contributed directly and indirectly to my work.

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All photographs are taken by the author, except for figure 9 (by Claudio Minca). Written permission (in possession of the author) has been obtained for Figure 6, 7 and 10-14.

Although some of them would not object to disclosing their names, I chose to respect the confidentiality of all my research participants in order to avoid the possibility of tracking down some of the informants who belong to the same local network. Tapes of the interviews are in possession of the author, filed with encryption. Faces of individuals are blurred in the photographs of public demonstrations in Beirut.

Note for the transliteration of Arabic words

Arabic words in the text have been transliterated into Latin font, following the guidelines provided by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES).

Similarly to IJMES, the Arabic names of places, political personalities, parties, renowned authors, and publications remain in the common English form as well as any other Arabic word that has become of common use in English.

However, the Arabic vowels with long pronunciation have been transliterated into *ā*, *ī*, and *ū*, for the reader's clarity about the position of the phonetic accent when pronouncing the word. For example, *shabāb* ('boys') reads "shabaab" with a vocalized long "a", where the phonetic accent falls.

The names of places that used to be part of the Ottoman Empire appear in the Turkish version, next to the Arabic one.

Some transliteration symbols deserve further phonetic clarification. The symbol *ʿ* stands for the Arabic letter *ayn* (ع), a guttural consonant that has no equivalent in English; while *`* stands for the sign *hamza* (ء) which indicates a pause at the beginning, middle or end of a word (for example, *tawāʿif* ('sects, groups') reads "tawaa-if" (stopping the phonetic emission between the long *ā* and *i*). The transliteration of the letter *qaf* (ق) differs from the transliteration of the letter *ka* (ك): while *ka* reads like the English *k* in "key", *qaf* consists of a more guttural sound added to *k*. The transliteration of the letter *dhal* (ذ) reads like the English "that".

Introduction. Power, Representation, And The Space Of Foreign Policy In The Lebanese Civil War

In India ...the village is, in sum, an estate unit and a financial unit prior to a residential unit [...] It is sufficient to rapidly browse the Oxford English Dictionary to realise that until some centuries ago, also in the Western culture the village used to have the same meaning that it maintains today in the Oriental one.

So that the question becomes: how, when and why did the village, in the modern epoch, come to signify the inhabited site, and not any longer the crop site? The answer is found in the most famous polemology work of the last century, "On War" by Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian general who had been Ritter's student. Clausewitz explains that the outline of the terrains impacts on the fighting in three ways: as an obstacle to the sight, as an obstacle to mobility, and as cover from the effects of fire. As a consequence, it was exactly on the basis of such criteria that between the Eight- and Nineteenth centuries people proceeded, in Europe, to the construction of topographic maps, selecting all the tracts of the earth according to the criteria of minor or major tactical value, and transforming [them] into obstacles or advantages.

(Farinelli 2003: 131)¹

Background And Research Questions

Beirut has come to be popularly known as a city that repeatedly destroys and rebuilds itself. This became – again – tragically evident in the first days of the Israeli operations against Lebanon in the summer of 2006, when the airpower of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) hit several arteries of Beirut's infrastructure. On July 19th, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora declared in an official speech that the Lebanese "will prevail as we face so many challenges while rebuilding what the enemy has destroyed. We have done so in the past. Our enemy knows death and destruction whereas we have learned how to be resilient, defend our nation and reconstruct" (Siniora 2006).

Part of the infrastructure that the IDF attacked in 2006 was the fruit of the reconstruction efforts during the post-war phase. Since the war ended in 1991, in fact,

¹ Author's translation.

Lebanese initiatives (Horizon 2000, Council for Development and Reconstruction), state governments (Italy, France) and trans-national programmes (Euro-Med, United Nations Development Program) contributed to the material reconstruction of the country (Dibeh 2005). The Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 13 April 1975 to October 1991, was prevalently fought in the densely built Lebanese cities and, in particular, the material infrastructure of the capital Beirut suffered extensive destruction (Davie 1983; Labaki and Abou Rjeily 1993). A remarkable number of the stories about wartime Beirut that populate literary works and that are evoked by Beirut's inhabitants involve the built fabric of the city: streets, check-points, blocks of apartments, squares and so on (Darwish 1995; Elias 2005; Makdisi 1990; Samman 1997). These stories describe the ways in which the built environment was used, perceived, and represented both by the civilians and the militia combatants.

Ever since my first trip to Beirut in the early 2000s, I found these stories fascinating for three main reasons. Firstly, they involved minuscule portions of urban territory, such as single buildings, alleyways, and squares. Secondly, they attributed a great amount of political and religious meaning to these minuscule spaces. And, thirdly, they were very different from the official accounts about the war that we find in the media and in the official diplomacy of the time. In other words, it seemed to me that they revealed an unusual, almost hidden knowledge of the war and of the ways in which it controlled and transformed the city. Moreover, they suggested that throughout the civil war geographies of fragmentation and of modern myths of homogeneous spaces were produced and developed within the city, but were – despite this – only simplistically regarded by the discourses of international foreign policy about the Lebanese civil war. These stories indicate that the changes in the material configuration of the city were inseparably linked to the socio-political processes through which the war evolved. In this thesis, I will analyse how militia practices and discourses of violence reflected on Beirut's built fabric, and – in return – how Beirut's built fabric became the means to consolidate and reproduce these discourses. I aim to explore the ways in which urban places become targets for destruction and to analyse the relationships that their becoming targets had with the geopolitical imaginations of the militias about Beirut, Lebanon, and their role in the international context.

The main questions around which the research develops are at least four: firstly, how did international foreign policy represent Lebanon between 1975 and 1976? Secondly,

how – alternatively – did the non-state belligerent actors (the militias) represent Beirut, Lebanon, and their role in the international context? Thirdly, can we find points of contact between these two sets of representations and understand whether and how they interacted and shaped each other? Finally, how did the built environment of Beirut reflect and shape these discursive interactions? In this introduction I identify some of the main theoretical ideas with which political geographers have engaged in the past two decades to interpret the mechanisms of power that shape geopolitical discourse and the representation of place in foreign policy. I will then highlight the discursive formation of the seemingly static distinction existing between official geopolitical representations of word politics from their unofficial and ‘non-legitimate’ versions.

A number of scholars, who deeply inspired the following chapters, have developed a more refined and informed understanding of the Lebanese militias than their usual consideration as ‘irrational forces’, ‘cruel’ actors, or ‘fanatics’ in the popular media as well as in a number of diplomatic statements. Authors have investigated their birth and the development of their mechanisms of violence (el Khazen 2000; Corm 2005), their role as providers of social services that replaced the state (Harik 1994), and as political actors who were often non-compliant of religious discourses within which they are popularly placed, and worked instead across the sectarian divisions in order to realise wider political goals (Rowayheb 2006). Other authors have focused on the relation between militia territoriality and visual mechanisms of propaganda (Chaktoura 2005), and have also explored the systems of urban warfare, the weapons used and the spatial transformations that these practices implied (Davie 1983), as well as the power structure and organization of specific militias and the production of specific spaces (Kemp 1983). These are, nevertheless, studies that often consider the whole duration of the war from 1975 to 1991, while this research focuses on the early phases of the conflict between 1975 and 1976 which, for reasons that we will later see, are very different from the following time periods. Furthermore, these previous studies occasionally focus on the features of one single militia or on one specific aspect of the militia activity (such as the public services). This thesis, however, examines the everyday discourses and practices of the militias in their relationship with the built fabric of the city. Finally, the previous studies, while important, do not, or only partially, consider the built environment as an aspect of the reciprocal relationship between wartime socio-political practices and discourses and their material context. Davie (1983) has illustrated the concrete impact of the practices of fight on the urban fabric of neighbourhoods and streets, with richness

of empirical examples, even if he has not addressed the ways in which the configuration of the material built environment, in return, shaped these practices. This aspect, therefore, still remains a broad terrain for investigation, and the same is true for the ways in which the geopolitical visions of the urban militias absorbed and reinterpreted the discourses of international diplomacy, and the ways in which these reinterpretations materialised through Beirut's built environment. I intend to explore this crucial aspect by engaging with post-structural approaches to the representation of global politics initiated in the 1990s in the English-speaking academia, and more specifically with the corpus of studies defined as "critical geopolitics", from the homonymous book by Geraoid Ò Tuathail (1996) and the special issues on critical geopolitics of the journal *Political Geography*² in the same year.

Critical geopolitics discursively analyses the ways in which knowledge about international statecraft is produced, represented, and translated into practices of foreign policy (Agnew 1998; Campbell 1992; Dodds 2005b; Ò Tuathail 1996b; Painter 1995). It unpacks the knowledge and practice of these "geopolitical visions"³ (Dijkink 1996) regarding them as contextually produced, rather than assuming that they are situations existing a priori and objective depictions of how world politics really look. It is widely accepted by critical political geographers that "government ministers or political figures are not outside the hegemonic national culture and thus the prevailing circulation of ideas and values shape their pronouncements" (Dodds 2003: 128). The post-structuralist approach of critical geopolitics dismantles the belief in the separation between categories such as 'high' and 'low' politics. As Painter has argued, "directly or indirectly politics permeates everything we do and influences all our lives" (1995: 8); politics is – in other words – a pervasive, dynamic process rather than an external phenomenon managed and imposed by isolated social elites with a privileged knowledge of events.

The elites of statecraft, however, trace geographical representations of international foreign policy which then acquire a hegemonic, accepted and often unquestioned status.

² *Political Geography* 15 (6-7).

³ Gertjan Dijkink describes geopolitical visions as "particular but shared visions (narratives) of the meaning of one's place in the world and the global system" (1996: 2). These narratives, according to Dijkink, work discursively to link the history and values of a political entity (namely the nation state) to a specific territory, legitimating new visions through repetition and reference to tradition, or employing recognizable symbols in the everyday life to construct narratives about the rest of the world that become unquestioned common sense, such as the 'cultural difference' between East and West.

My aim in these pages is to interpret the mechanisms of power and knowledge underpinning these processes of representation that turn partial geopolitical perspectives into accepted commonsense which – most importantly – justifies military action on the international scene. These theoretical premises will constitute the basis to illustrate how the space of Beirut during the civil war became the site of encounter between the geopolitical perspectives of official international relations and the multiple interpretations of those official visions by unofficial actors in the war. These non-official interpretations are then reflected on the changes in the built fabric of the city, in this case especially through its targeting and destruction.

I will now proceed to illustrate some of the theoretical views in political geography about the relations between the space of global politics and the politics of its representation, starting from a contemporary anecdote. Through this anecdote, and taking inspiration from critical geopolitics, I will introduce some of the basic ideas about the space of foreign policy, and the partiality of its representation. I will then employ these ideas to develop my discussion, whose structure I will present later in this introduction.

The “Lie Of The Land”: Representing Place And Difference In Foreign Policy

On 17 July 2006, one microphone at the G8 summit in Saint Petersburg remained erroneously switched on, and the following exchange of opinions between the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and U.S. President George Bush about the war that was under course in Lebanon and Israel was unexpectedly broadcast through the official television channel of the summit:

Blair: I don't know what you guys have talked about, but as I say I am perfectly happy to try and see what the lie of the land is, but you need that done quickly because otherwise it will spiral.

Bush: I think Condi⁴ is going to go pretty soon.

Blair: But that's, that's, that's all that matters. But if you... you see it will take some time to get that together.

Bush: Yeah, yeah.

Blair: But at least it gives people...

4 Abbreviation for U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Bush: It's a process, I agree. I told her your offer to...

Blair: Well...it's only if I mean... you know. If she's got a..., or if she needs the ground prepared as it were... Because obviously if she goes out, she's got to succeed, if it were, whereas I can go out and just talk.

Bush: You see, the ... thing is what they need to do is to get Syria, to get Hezbollah to stop doing this shit and it's over (Times Online 2006).

In one of the first passages of this conversation, Tony Blair stated that he was “perfectly happy to try and see what *the lie of the land* is, but [that it needed to be] done quickly because otherwise [the violence] will spiral (Times Online 2006)”. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) explains the meaning of the phrase “the lie of the land” as a figurative expression for “the state, position, or aspect (of affairs, etc.)”. The meaning of this expression is as geographical as it is modern in its claim for realism and for its faith in the coincidence between reality and its cartographic representation: if one is able to quickly grasp “the lie of the land”, then (s)he will be able to make the right choices and implement effective actions. Failing to do so can compromise the state of affairs or undermine the course of action, as another phrase in the OED reports: “if anyone is to blame it is I, for not giving you the lie of the land before”.

The expression “the lie of the land” has also been used by American geographer Don Mitchell (1996) who has unpacked the persisting imaginary of a certain image of the Californian landscape in European literature over 200 years– “palm trees, golden hills, extensive orchards, suburban sprawl, apartments scaling hillsides in San Francisco, towering redwoods, the valleys of Yosemite and Imperial” (1996: 8), highlighting the material and political struggles, loaded with high human costs, that have served to keep that imaginary alive. Mitchell wrote a counter story of the Californian lie of the land – that he interprets as “landscape” – in order to denounce the dissolution of the histories of fatigue and deprivation of the Californian agricultural working class into the dominant image of the world famous Californian landscape. Mitchell reads side by side the dominant landscape discourse (“palm trees, golden hills”, and so on) with the practices and spaces that are usually left out from the accepted image of the Californian landscape, such as the experiences of migrant workers, the politics of the elites of agribusiness, as well as the geographies of labour camps, fields and squatter settlements.

Landscape, Mitchell argues, is not a given. It is “constantly reformed” (1996: 201) and it is the fruit of a constant “give and take of social and spatial relations” (1996:201).

This reasoning shows (although putting class first) the relationship between prevailing and subdued knowledges as a constant reformulation, rather than as a fixed separation or a rigidly dialectic relationship between them. In other words, there does not exist an already right or wrong lie of the land, as this is always being contextually produced: there will always be someone “giv[ing] lie to the land” (Mitchell 1996: 200) and the task of critical research resides in understanding the webs of power that make this process possible, rather than in judging which type of lie is the most legitimate one.

The expression “the lie of the land” has, therefore, a double geopolitical meaning. Claiming to discover and provide information about “the lie of the land” aims to know the reality of the situation or of the terrain, to allow its control and to act strategically on the basis of an ‘objective’, if not of scientific expertise. Numerous historical examples of the use of this expression in the OED are taken from the agricultural and geological domains. The best practice to choose, select, and act on the basis of strategic advantage and disadvantage, is the result of the expertise in representing and recognizing certain features of “the land”, an ability that Italian geographer Franco Farinelli (2003), building on Von Clausewitz (2007), argues to be the link between modern war and modern cartography – as shown in the opening quote to this introduction. There is also a second meaning for the noun lie; in the OED, it is defined as “an act or instance of lying; a false statement made with intent to deceive”. In other words, if envisioned with a different “way of seeing”⁵ (Haraway 2004: 88), the lie of the land can be deceiving. The lie of the land is, therefore, not a faithful mirror of reality, as it includes also its reverse – the lie, the false statement – that is to say its absences and silences, the knowledges that are left out of the map when tracing the ‘true’ lie of the land such as Mitchell’s California. But there is no right or wrong lie: there is, rather, a continuous re-working of the combination between what constitutes the first lie – i.e. the selective gathering and elaboration of information about the features of a situation or state of things according to this or that interest – and what is included in the second lie – i.e. the information that is left out of the selection and, therefore, considered non-objective, confusing, or even false elements in the attempt to design the ‘objective’ lie of the land.

5 Donna Haraway (2004) links the question of objectivity in modern science to the contextual character of vision technologies. Vision is produced and embodied and is mediated by a range of artefacts constituting “technological mediations” (satellites, maps, surveillance systems and so on). These artefacts, however, are then presented as transparent and innocent, when instead even their possession or non possession is embedded within unequal mechanisms of power. According to Haraway, “all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is ways of life” (2004: 88).

In other words, there are other knowledges that are overlooked, hidden, or subdued, by hegemonic representations, but this relation of power is not a predetermined or unchangeable one, and the point of critical research is not to decree which knowledge is ultimately the most legitimate, but rather to analyse the processes whereby a specific relation of power/knowledge is put into place.

We could interpret the circumstances in which the dialogue between Tony Blair and George Bush took place, in light of the approach of critical political geography to the relationship between foreign policy and its public exhibition: there is no such thing as an untainted truth in foreign policy, and the boundaries between the practice of foreign policy, its institutional materialization and its diffusion, are all but rigid. It is considered common sense that “because such statements are public and designed for wide circulation...they are of superficial and not substantive value in understanding how foreign policy really works” (Ó Tuathail 1992: 158). This perspective relies on a structural belief in the actual existence of a fundamental geopolitical truth waiting to be discovered, of a genuine and immutable meaning of things whose knowledge is the exclusive possession of the experts of statecraft. Hence, in the dialogue between Blair and Bush, the barrier between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics has fallen, because what was represented as an official and objective commonsensical image of the events in Lebanon, slipped out – unwillingly and in a rather vulgarized way – and revealed itself deprived of its usual official aura; it showed itself as a negotiation, a series of choices made by actors that are not working outside the contested political processes onto which they aim at having an objective and conclusive perspective. Blair and Bush’s microphone slip showed us the combinations of power and knowledge that make geopolitical statements of international foreign policy the only legitimate ones to enunciate and that render them acceptable common sense, for example, in the case of the assumption of concatenation between certain allegedly interrelated and collaborating political entities – Syria and Hezbollah – and the resolution of the Lebanese conflict, while other actors, such as Israel and, more importantly, today’s major suspect ally of Hezbollah (Iran), were instead kept out of the equation.

In the past two decades at least, critical theory has dismantled the claims of objectivity and the scientific character of international foreign policy. Geopolitics is no longer seen as a static, authoritative and elitist discipline, but rather as a power/knowledge combination based on contested practices of elaboration of meanings about security and

danger among states (Campbell 1992). Geopolitics, however, is neither limited to the ideas elaborated in the academia or in disciplinary think tanks (formal geopolitics), nor is it sealed by the official statements of more classical actors in their “practical geopolitics” (the foreign policy of governments, the strategies of the military). On the contrary, geopolitics extends to, and is reproduced within unofficial, informal, “banal” (Billig 2000) everyday realms such as press, art, or public demonstrations (popular geopolitics), which support, reinterpret or resist the elaboration and implementation of geopolitical narratives.

Anti-Geopolitical Eyes And Subjugated Knowledges In The Lebanese Civil War

The metaphor of the lie of the land indicates an open-ended rewriting of the combinations between what constitutes the lie of the land in geopolitics and what is a geopolitical lie, that is to say the remaining knowledges deemed as irrelevant by geopolitical dominant discourses. The production of the lie of the land always already implies also a series of lies, of knowledges that are actively left out of the selective production of a geopolitical discourse but, because of their status as remnants of a selection, are also implied in the production of that hegemonic discourse. As French radical geographer Yves Lacoste (1982: 5) stated, “there is not just one geopolitics, that of the state reason; there are other geopolitics”⁶. But how do we approach critically these diverse lies of the land in a way that does not simply replicate a rigid dialectic between a priori truths and a priori geopolitical lies, and that does not – most importantly – imply a further claim to objectivity and to the possession of a ‘real’ perspective on global politics? Two final ideas sustain my theoretical position with regards to power, geopolitics and representation and will inspire my questioning of the separation between official and unofficial narratives in the Lebanese civil war and particularly in Beirut’s built environment.

The first idea is Geroaid Ò Tuathail’s notion of “anti-geopolitical eye”. This idea consists in “a disturbing way of seeing that disrupts the framework of the hegemonic geopolitical eye that structures the seeing of places...in contemporary foreign policy discourse” (1996a: 173). The embodiment of the anti-geopolitical eye, according to Ò Tuathail, was British journalist Maggie O’Kane’s reporting from the war in Bosnia in

⁶ Author’s translation.

the early 1990s. Through her vicinity to the war scene and her emphasis on the voices and bodies of the civilian victims of the war, rather than on the official actors and statements, her journalism posed a challenge to the detached views of the 'experts' of international politics. According to Ò Tuathail, the anti-geopolitical eye should not negate geopolitics nor aim to constitute a truer version of it. The anti-geopolitical eye should instead look to unsettle dominant geopolitical narratives through the exposure of ones that remain "morally invisible" (1996a: 220). The idea of an anti-geopolitical eye – in other words – should not lead to the idea that there is a rigid dialectic, a direct antagonism between one already dominant story and one other, already subdued counter story. As Ò Tuathail himself points out, we should not re-create truth out of geopolitical counter perspectives, but rather leave the ground open for the exposure of other geographies or – as Lacoste (1982) points out – other geopolitics.

The second idea is Michel Foucault's idea of "subjugated knowledges" (2003: 7), on which the notion of anti-geopolitical eye partly builds. Michel Foucault defined subjugated knowledges as "the non commonsensical knowledges that people have" (2003: 8). Bearing in mind the inextricability of power and knowledge⁷ in Foucault's thought, a subjugated knowledge is a type of knowledge that has not acquired or produced what constitutes legitimate recognition in a specific episteme, so to become "common knowledge". It is, therefore, "a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is local, regional, or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that surround it" (2003: 7-8). I will apply this idea about the existence of hegemonic and subjugated knowledges to the creation, diffusion and material specification of geopolitical scripts between 1975 and 1976. However, I will also put the accent on how these knowledges interacted in different combinations rather than remaining discrete containers – the official and the unofficial, the state and the militia, the hegemonic and the subjugated. In other words,

⁷ I adopt here Michel Foucault's definition of "power/knowledge" as the terrain in which webs of power and visions of what constitutes reality mutually interact: "Perhaps [...] we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests [...] We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another: that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. [...] [I]t is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (1997: 27-28).

these knowledges, as we will see, have genealogies that reveal common and intermingled ontological and epistemological references, which can be revealed through reading these discourses side by side, in a contrapuntal fashion, so to reveal the spaces in which they come together and where their boundaries blur: where the state is also somehow thinking like a militia, and the militia is thinking like a state. The notion of subjugated knowledges stems from Michel Foucault's (2000a: 354) conception of power which sees it – especially state power – as not so much an utterly dominating force imposed onto society from an univocal external authority (what he called negative power), but rather a complex and creative web of heterogeneous manifestations. These specifications spring from the dialectic processes between the attempt to impose a will and the tactics to resist or to reinterpret that will (what Foucault called positive power). Foucault illustrates power as a constellation of technologies that act pervasively in different localised contexts, continuously changing form and specifications, rather than irradiating from an unitary source in a homogenous fashion:

there exists no *single* power, but several powers. Powers, which means to say forms of domination, forms of subjection, which function locally [...]. All these are local, regional forms of power, which have their own way of functioning, their own procedure and technique. All these forms of power are heterogeneous. We cannot therefore speak of power, if we want to do an analysis of power, but we must speak of powers and try to localize them in their historical and geographical specificity (Foucault 2007: 156, emphasis in the text).

In Foucault's vision, the "techniques" (Foucault 2000a: 357) through which power works are immanent to the social context in which they operate and they evolve in it, acquiring "specific effects" (2000a: 362) at local levels and through the practices of localized subjects.

The relation between the lie of the land and its – supposed – lies, should be envisioned as complex and open-ended, rather than as dialectical. So, Foucault's (2007) "positive" notion of power is useful to open up the ground to a numerous series of geopolitical knowledges and to treat them not as powerful or non-powerful, but to see them all as different specifications of multifaceted and multi-sited power web. Through this vision, the point of exposing a non-hegemonic narrative is not to make it more powerful than

the other – which would mean to create another geopolitical truth and thus maintaining the status quo – but to expose and subvert the mechanisms of power that allow one or the other to become more powerful or to be relegated to invisibility.

Spatial Definitions Of The Lebanese Civil War

Violence in Lebanon has not systematically been defined as a “civil war”⁸. For example, while Israeli officials regularly used the expression “civil war” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976), the French, United States and Vatican representatives employed various periphrases such as “civilian struggles” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976d), “the problem in Lebanon” (White House 1976a), “very serious events” (Paul VI 1975a), and “disagreements” (Paul VI 1975b).

On the intellectual front, since 1975 there have been various attempts to provide broad explanations for the causes of the war. This has occasionally resulted in the elaboration of numerous myths about the war, especially within popular culture and the media, as observed by Corm (1992). These sweeping theories about grand or even ‘secret’ projects for Lebanon – such as the federal subdivision of the country in sectarian territories – machinated by unspecified ‘external’ forces, also brought about a feeling of magnified geopolitical significance of Lebanon among many Lebanese, who see in their country a small land that is, for various reasons, crucially significant for the international scene (Salem 1992). Attempts to find conclusive explanations and definitions for the events presents a twofold disembodiment from the spatial specificities of violence: on the one hand, the search for inclusive and conclusive grand theories trying to explain supposed obscure diplomatic machinations behind the war –

⁸ I use this term in the connotation of “armed conflict not of an international character”, as indicated in the third version of the Geneva Convention (1949:36: 1).

This definition includes four aspects that define a conflict as civil war: 1) that the Party in revolt against the *de jure* Government possesses an organized military force, an authority responsible for its acts, acting within a determinate territory and having the means of respecting and ensuring respect for the Convention. 2) That the legal Government is obliged to have recourse to the regular military forces against insurgents organized as military and in possession of a part of the national territory. 3) (a) That the *de jure* Government has recognized the insurgents as belligerents; or (b) that it has claimed for itself the rights of a belligerent; or (c) that it has accorded the insurgents recognition as belligerents for the purposes only of the present Convention; or (d) that the dispute has been admitted to the agenda of the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations as being a threat to international peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression. (4) (a) That the insurgents have an organization purporting to have the characteristics of a State. (b) That the insurgent civil authority exercises *de facto* authority over the population within a determinate portion of the national territory. (c) That the armed forces act under the direction of an organized authority and are prepared to observe the ordinary laws of war. (d) That the insurgent civil authority agrees to be bound by the provisions of the Convention.

mostly referring to regional or international interests – tended to remove from the quotidian crimes any individual political responsibility and characterization. However, these explanations have also often elevated the particular ideologies of single militia leaders to some sort of keys to make sense of the whole conflict and political reality in Lebanon, thus reducing the complexity and specificity of violence to simplistic definitions of Lebanon as a place ruled by fratricide sectarianism (Corm 1992).

All this considered, I chose to focus my attention on the initial phase of the conflict which began on April 13, 1975 and ended in November 1976, and apply interpretive depth to this complex and contested subject, rather than trying to investigate the whole course of the war between 1975 and 1990, as many have previously done. Accounts of the consequences of the entire period of the civil war for the urban geography of Beirut already exist (Beyhum 1994; Bourgey 1985), as well as a number of works on the human and material damage of the whole conflict (Labaki and Abu Rjeily 1993). However, it would be far too ambitious to interpret the political geographies of the whole Lebanese war in this research because the spatial production of the conflict was changing throughout this period of time, and it was the by-product of contested and ever transforming contingencies.

One of the primary reasons for this choice is the spatial production of the pre- and post-1978 phases of the war. Various scholars (Corm 2005; Kassir 2003) agree about a change in the strategic politics, geographical span, and geopolitical weight of the Lebanese conflict in the post-1978 phase as compared to the 1975-76, and they seem to propose that “beginning in mid-1978, the nature and scope of the war changed” (El Khazen 2000: 5). The entry of the Syrian and Israeli armies on Lebanese soil, the following intervention of the international peacekeeping force, and finally the rise of Shiite suicide terrorism in the 1980s, have very often been considered as events that transferred the Lebanese conflict to a different scale. This shift included the involvement of regular armies, the internationalization of the conflict, the solidification of the militias’ structure and organization (el Khazen 2000) and of their affiliations to foreign powers (Corm 2005), as well as the use of heavy artillery and of air power (Davie 1983). These aspects translated into transformations of the urban material landscape that presented differences from the material imprint of the previous phase, mainly because of the vast destruction of extended air attacks and heavy artillery, which

substituted or were superimposed on the irregular and partial ruination due to guerrilla fighting (Møystad 1998).

There have been numerous attempts to categorize the geographical and political extent of the different moments of the war as well as to define the nature and the actors of the Lebanese conflict using various labels such as “war for the others” (Tueni 1985), or “Arab Israeli conflict” (El Ezzi 1991) and “Arab civil war” (El Khazen 2000: 394) among others. Therefore, studies of the Lebanese war from 1975 to 1991 are often based on structural discourses about scale: in the literature, we find arguments about the ‘level’ occupied by the Lebanese war in national, regional and international politics; and how the war ‘reached’ wider extensions and higher levels of relevance in international politics according to the types of militarism employed (street-to-street fighting with light weaponry, heavy artillery, air power). The definition of the Lebanese war in its different phases also relies on different geographical framings, going from the militia-controlled neighbourhood, to the state, the Arab region, and finally the international Cold War scenery. These definitions all tend to fit the civil war within an ontology made of fixed vertical levels or horizontal extensions: they adopt a scalar perspective from which to define the war in its whole (Farinelli 2003; Massey 2004; Taylor 1982). Rather than blindly adopting any of these definitions, I will attempt to avoid the idea that we need to identify *one* scale on which to locate the events of the war and instead look at the multi-scalar references in the urban geopolitics of Beirut.

A rich literature in critical human geography in the past three decades has unpacked structural visions of scale as fixed and transcendent hierarchies determining social reality and has repositioned the notion of scale within relations of power and representation, considering scale as immanent to political and social processes, as a contested and constantly renegotiated discourse and practice (Delaney and Leitner 1997; Marston 2000). Furthermore, recent debates have analysed the implications of what has been called “flat ontology” (Marston et al. 2005) to abandon any reference to notions of scale, as critical as they might be. These views, building on a number of philosophies of de-territorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, among others), conceptualise socio-spatial processes as “event-space” (2005: 424) made of immanent relations between undifferentiated human and non-human actors. It is not my aim to study specifically the scalar discourses and practices of the Lebanese civil war or place them within this literature. However, at this stage, it seems useful to state my position about how the

spaces of political violence have been produced in Beirut. This will become crucial when – as we will observe later – a series of scalar references constitute the intertwined discourses of both the official and the unofficial accounts of the civil war.

There are indeed deep differences between the Two Years' War and the successive moments of the Lebanese conflict, and recognizing them is crucial in order to analyse the spatial constitution of Beirut during the civil war. Nevertheless, rather than availing myself of conclusive definitions of the war based on an a priori idea of scale, I choose to focus my attention on the sites where different ideas of Lebanon and its place in the world were produced and contested in the urban built environment during the early phase of the Lebanese civil war, when, among the fight for the definition of the main urban frontlines, references to different places and geopolitical scales were frequent in the militia visual propaganda, leaders' statements, and, finally, in the memory of my research participants.

Geopolitical scripts in Beirut have been absorbed, re-elaborated, and renegotiated in the midst of the battle by the militias, whom – considering their references to dominant geopolitical codes and events taking place beyond Lebanon's borders – it would be hard to define as 'local', 'parochial', or 'sub-national', as they were in fact local, national and international at the same time. Similarly – although in a very different context – to Jeffrey's (2007) argument in the case of local NGOs in post-war Bosnia, I will, therefore, envision political violence in Beirut as producing spaces in which multiple scale discourses informed the conduct of localised actors.

Building on these wide theoretical premises, I will outline a critical geopolitics of the Lebanese civil war, which will treat both official foreign policy discourses and unofficial militia interpretations of these discourses as partial narratives. It is from the point of view of the specific interactions of the dominant with some of the differential knowledges of the Lebanese civil war that I will provide the answers my research questions in the chapters that I will now outline.

Structure Of The Work

In order to understand the relationships between the official and unofficial geopolitical narratives during the Lebanese civil war and the ways in which they intermingled with

the practices of urban warfare in Beirut, in Chapter One I will review some of the literature about the role of cities within wars and global politics. I address these studies because of their engagement with the inseparability of social processes and spatial expressions and – specifically – with the processes whereby political violence makes some portions of the built environment of cities a deliberate target for annihilation by state or non-state actors, in different measures and with different meanings at work. This body of literature has been defined as “urban geopolitics” (Graham 2004e) and among its heterogeneous contents is the idea of “urbicide”, defined as the “killing of cities” (Bogdanovic 1993, 1994).

Focussing on the early phases of the Lebanese war (1975-1976) led me to choose a series of methodological strategies that I adopted through four months of residential fieldwork in Beirut from October 2005 to January 2006, which is described in chapter Two. During my stay in Beirut, I encountered a number of key methodological challenges that included writing about the past and present violence unsettling Lebanon’s stability. Writing about past events that the interviewees re-tell in the present time presented problems and pitfalls related to the representation of history and matters of objectivity and legitimacy. Moreover, being a ‘Western’ UK-funded researcher who writes about a postcolonial war such as the Lebanese civil war, and about the experiences of its witnesses, is an aspect that needed to be problematised. As for the empirical methods, I investigated Beirut’s urban geopolitical imaginations using in-depth interviews with former militia fighters, local journalists and architects. I also conducted archival research into written, visual and audiovisual historical documents. Researching the official discourses of foreign policy about the civil war included a careful selection of the sets of documents to consider according to the themes I wanted to highlight in my discursive analysis – Orientalism, modern cartographic perspective and sectarian determinism. This required mediating between the presence of these aspects and the accessibility (in terms of language and availability to the public) of the documents in which they appear. I used the idea of genealogical investigation⁹ (Foucault 2003) and of contrapuntal reading¹⁰ (Said 1994) to bring these two sets of

9 Michel Foucault (2003) has defined a genealogical investigation as one that “fight[s] the power-effect characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific” (9). A genealogical study exposes the partiality of accepted discourses by bringing to light those ‘non-scientific’ statements and histories that constitute the absences implied by a hegemonic discourse, such as that of geopolitics.

10 Edward Said (1994) borrowed the expression from the musical vocabulary, where counterpoint (or contrapunct) indicates a combination of melodies obtained by accompanying a given melody with a further, different one. Said turns the idea of counterpoint into a theory and a methodology to critically de-

sources together and analyse the loose boundaries of their formation and enactment and the zones of epistemological contamination between both.

There is one main connection between the urban territorialities of the early phases of the civil war and the official discourses about the war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1976: the perpetuation of modern classifications and cultural tropes that are the legacy of Lebanon's colonial past. I highlight this relationship in Chapter Three. Here, building on the ideas of postcolonial theory scholars such as Timothy Mitchell (1991), I show the impact of colonial modernity on the production of new ways to conceive and represent Lebanese space and society from the last decades of the Ottoman Empire until World War One, through the era of the French mandate (1920-1946), up to Lebanon's independence years since 1943 and the eve of the civil war in the 1970s. I do this by analyzing some of the colonial discourses and practices that produced a "culture of sectarianism" (Makdisi 2000) according to which the sect can be seen as a container of identity and politics as well as territory. I place this aspect at the centre of the modern taxonomies that connect Lebanon's official and unofficial geographies of the civil war. In other words, the culture of the sect pervaded the territorial and political representation of modern Lebanon in its constitution as a nation-state. I argue that the differentiation of social subjects through the idea of the sect, together with the use of this idea for shaping and governing the Lebanese territory, is one key to understand Lebanon's modern and contemporary geographies of political violence.

My choice of focusing on the early phases of the civil war, from April 1975 to late 1976, aims to demonstrate the complexity of urban fighting that official international foreign policy overlooked because its gaze focused exclusively on the political contours of the territorial nation-state. The focus of Chapter Four is constituted by the events leading to the Two Years' war, as the 1975-1976 conflict is popularly known. This was dominated by irregular fighting at close quarters, in which around twenty distinct Lebanese and non Lebanese militia groups were engaged. This phase was very different from the following ones in which new elements – such as airpower and heavy artillery used by the Israeli and Syrian regular armies – were added to the urban guerrilla fighting. This following phase was in fact dominated by the entry of the Arab Deterrent

subjugate the absent and obfuscated aspects that are nevertheless implied in the discourses and practices of imperialism. Contrapunctuality has recently provided a frame for conducting more aware research in realist International Relations (Chowdhry 2007), its use being thus extended into further realms of the social and cultural studies.

Force in 1978, the invasion of south Lebanon by Israel in the same year, and the siege of Beirut by the Israeli Defence Force in 1982.

Orientalist rhetoric and deterministic visions of the sect constitute the colonial legacy in the official geopolitical scripting of Lebanon. In Chapter Five, I analyse the qualitative data emerging from official documents from the American, French, and Israeli administrations, as well as statements from the Vatican, to illustrate the manufacturing of geopolitical common sense about Lebanon's problems between 1975 and 1976. What John Agnew (1998) has defined the "territorial trap", indicating the nation-state based gaze of international foreign policy since the birth of modern territorial states, is also a feature of the official discourses of international foreign policy on Lebanon. This exclusive focus on the spatiality of the nation state obfuscated the urban complexity of the first phases of the civil war, together with the agency and the logic of power of the militias. Orientalist tropes were used to depict the 'irrational', 'fanatic' and incomprehensibly chaotic local actors in the conflict. In these official representations, the insurmountable difference between state geopolitics and the unofficial sides of the war was implicitly maintained in the power mechanisms of the expertise of statecraft.

Drawing on interview material collected in Beirut, I wish to unsettle this structural separation by narrating the militias' stories about Beirut and its built fabric. These stories, in Chapter Six, aim to present a different perspective on the space of Beirut from the one of the state-centred accounts and their cartographic logic. By investigating the spatial history of the first two years of the civil war in Beirut, seen from the point of view of its unofficial representations, I analyze the ways in which the rival militia made sense of Beirut's space. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the unofficial geopolitical imaginations of the militias did not develop in isolation from the geopolitical visions of international foreign policy. In fact, through daily practices and discourses of urban fighting, the militias also produced meanings about the Lebanese nation-state and its role in relation to other nation states. Moreover, the built environment of Beirut constituted the platform for the material translation of these unofficial geopolitical practices and discourses, as well as serving as the medium for their reinforcement. Finally, the built environment became the site for the reciprocal shaping between the official and unofficial geopolitical imaginations.

One of the main points developed in this research is that urbicide is the product of a contested spatiality rather than the symptom of geopolitical change such as the end of the Cold War and the rise of asymmetric conflict characterising the so called “new wars” (Kaldor 1999). This also entails, on a more theoretical level, that space – and in this case urban space – is at once the reflection of and the tool for the enactment of social practices, rather than a mere background where events unfold (Isin 2002; Massey 2004; Soja 1996). Building on this argument, urbicide can be then seen as a reflection of and a tool for the specification of political meanings through the built environment in Beirut. One further aspect I mean to develop through this work are the crucial, but understudied, connections existing between the Lebanese territorial history, its modern government and the idea of sectarianism, which we need to explore critically in order to better understand political violence in contemporary Lebanon. The ultimate aim of this work is to show how the urban built environment is a site through which it is possible to analyse and tackle the socio-spatial links that have shaped the escalation of political violence linked to sectarian identity in Lebanon, in the past like at the present moment.

Chapter 1. The Political Geographies Of Urbicide

These stricken people belong to one of the largest shadow communities in the world today, victims of a great crime without a name. Let us give it a name now: URBICIDE – the murder of a city.
(Berman 1996: 175)

1.1 Introduction: architectures of enmity.

In the last three decades, political geographers have dedicated a great number of studies to illustrate how political world maps are discursively produced and how, therefore, they can be deconstructed (Harley 2002). All representations of the space of foreign policy are not spontaneous and necessary, but partial and contextually produced views of the world that the power webs of state governments imbue with their ideology. The threads composing these views of the world are the result of what has been called “imaginative geographies” (Gregory 2004; Said 2003), narratives about cultural divides that (supposedly) exist in the world and that experts in foreign policy present as objective. These imaginative geographies are expressed through metaphors about difference which label states as friendly or hostile. These threads translate into spatial representations that finally acquire concrete strategic reflections in global politics: they shape global “architectures of enmity”, as Derek Gregory (2004) has defined them. Imaginative geographies, in other words, provide the cultural and rhetorical foundations for deliberating and implementing military actions against the places that structure those architectures of enmity. Recent literature in urban studies has been engaging with the role and meaning of cities within these architectures of enmity. In this chapter, I will review some of the studies about the relationships existing between contemporary urban places and a number of dynamics in global politics. Following this review, I will present two types of positions that – in my view – these studies take with regards to these relationships: those conceiving the mutual connection between cities and political violence as a post-cold war novelty and those which consider – instead – political violence as an eternal component in the existence of cities, which had been rhetorically concealed throughout modernity. I will then present the case of the destruction of Beirut

in 1975 and 1976 as ideal to interpret urbicide from the perspective of geographical contextuality, rather than through historical categorisation.

1.2 Cities In The Contemporary Architectures Of Enmity: Conflict, Terror And Urban Places.

State officials and experts in geopolitics and international relations are often considering cities or parts of cities, especially in Europe and the US, as under terrorist attack. For example, the Italian government has released – immediately after 11 September 2001 – a list of sites in the major Italian cities (or around them) that could be considered under the threat of an imminent attack¹¹; the US government constantly adjusts its “national threat advisory” on a national level (Department of Homeland Security 2008). A number of studies have analyzed the militarization of urban space within the geopolitical developments following the events of 11 September and have discussed critically “the blurring of war and other-than-war conditions” (Warren 2004: 222) that characterizes contemporary discourses of urban fear and their translation into policies of protection and prevention. Scholars have also investigated the implications for post-11 September urban everyday life, where technology – especially digital surveillance (Lyon 2004) – transforms urban sites into Automated Socio Technical Environments (ASTEs; see Coaffee 2004) that seem to provide technological fixes to guarantee security, but often in ways that limit liberty and movement or that segregate globally connected and ‘sensitive’ urban areas from their immediate physical surroundings, such as in the case of the city of London (Coaffee 2004; Gold and Revill 2000). Technological fixes often prove ineffective and in denial of alternative – more embodied, more human, more engaged – strategies of understanding terrorism and its often uncomfortable geopolitical connections (Lyon 2004; see also Gregory 2004).

What appears to have become a sort of “single, transnational, urbanizing battlespace” (Graham 2006b: 271) is, however, also composed of those targeted cities that undergo attacks of state-sponsored violence in the name of the “war against terror”. Recent works in urban geopolitics have widely explored the formation of “urban imaginative geographies” (Graham 2006b: 257) underpinning the policies that guide the war on terror. These are the product of ontological divides traced between the cities of the

¹¹ Among the “high risk sites” in the list, were: embassies and other diplomatic institutions, the Vatican, airline companies, tourist agents, synagogues, Jewish schools, Universities, cultural and religious centres, headquarters of multinational firms, retail points of chain stores such as Mc Donald's, Blockbuster e Planet Hollywood. ... all the main artistic cities, ... military bases, power plants, tv stations, phone companies, chemical industries, fuel deposits.” (Ministero dell'Interno 2001).

Western ‘homeland’ and those – especially in the Arab and Islamic world – depicted as sites where terrorism nests. These ‘other’ urban places are often depicted through neo-Orientalist images of chaotic urban mazes, whose inhabitants act out of instinctive, irrational or fanatic behaviours. Ultimately, these cities seem to embody obscure, labyrinthine places ideal for hiding terrorists. These tropes recall the taxonomies used by modern imperial powers to represent the exotic urban spaces of their colonies (Graham 2006b; Gregory 2004, 2006a; Mitchell 1991).

When the U.S. army, the RAF, and the IDF attack them, cities such as Kabul, Baghdad, the Occupied Territories, and the villages of South Lebanon, are rhetorically placed by Western governments as well as by the Israeli government, into exceptional realms that Gregory defines as “zones of indistinction” (2006b: 635) and that the U.S., the Israeli and other Western armies treat as blank spaces where inhabitants do not count as victims but are rather considered as ‘collateral damage’ of military operations or as potential ‘supporters’ of terrorism. These spaces are treated as “kill boxes” (Gregory 2006b: 635). Discourses in American and Western foreign policy, as well as the popular media, locate the targeted cities at the cultural antipodes of the secured “homeland cities” of the West: cities such as Falluja are depicted in an Orientalised manner, as chaotic urban environments which resist ‘liberation’ and which, with their ‘intricate’ urban structure, pose a material threat to the total surveillance technologies of state armies. Such descriptions nurture an imaginary of terrorism which leads to “demonise” (Graham 2005: 2) these cities and insert them within global architectures of enmity that make them legitimate military targets of the war against terror. The Orientalising imaginative geographies of Arab-Islamic urbanism underpin military actions during which, as Gregory (2006b) has argued, civilians cease to be protected by international law, and are left – such as in the case of the war on Lebanon in 2006 – at the mercy of the war machine, before the eyes of an inert international community that has failed to protect them. Gregory asks whether in these acts of war we are witnessing the erasure of the civilian as a political category after it had been produced in the second half of the eighteenth century as a concept opposed to that of the soldier and after it affirmed itself and was adopted by common use following the Hague and Geneva conventions of 1923 and 1949, designed to protect the non-combatant population from land and aerial warfare. This protection, however, as Gregory states, building on Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) idea of the “state of exception”, is granted only insofar as its subjects are located outside the political dialogue. These excepted individuals are placed outside of the

political debate and, therefore, have a bodily presence, but are without a political entity, which means that “they retain voice [...] but they are denied language” (Gregory 2006b: 634). According to Gregory, the “death of the civilian” (633) happens when the international community fails to speak for the victims of such geopolitical events as the 2006 war on Lebanon.

Although represented and treated as killing zones, targeted cities are nonetheless part of the same imaginative geographies that Western governments employ to separate ‘our’ from ‘their’ urban sites (Graham 2005; Gregory 2004). We could then say that – in these imaginative geographies – targeted cities are not totally exterior to secured cities, but rather the former are entangled in a relationship of implication with the latter: they are in a state of “inclusive exclusion” (Minca 2007: 82). The relation of exception, in other words, does not denote a total separation between these two types of cities, but rather it entails a relation of implication whose boundaries are determined by the sovereign power (in our case, international foreign policy) which is at the basis of the mechanism of the state of exception. As Minca (2007: 82) has argued, building on Agamben (1998), “it is precisely upon the exclusion of the bare life [in the colonial city] that the modern city is founded”. This is to say that these cities are considered as exceptional, but also that these are the places upon which Western cities shape their own social and built environments on the basis of narratives of security and danger. Therefore, target cities become killing terrains, populated only by (less than, or other than) human targets who move on a neutral and undifferentiated space that waits to be disintegrated in the name of the defence of secured cities. In name of this relation of exception, the landscape of targeted urban places is utterly disembodied, flattened, reduced to military technology like the signs on army digital maps: as Derek Gregory (2006a: 94) remarks, it is K-A-B-U-L that is attacked, and not Kabul.

If the God-trick vision of military technology can conceive cities as nothing more than targets and groups of data viewed from war machines flying over them or cutting across them, things on the street level are quite different. The U.S. Military Operations in Urban Terrains doctrine (MOUT) is coming to terms with the complexity of close quarter urban combat, and this is why its scientists are conceiving new technologies through which it can be possible to control complex and multilayered urban sites (Graham 2005). The Israeli army has traced new paths in the management of urban conflict in the Palestinian occupied territories that have then been used by the U.S.

Army in the “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq (Graham 2006b). These paths have created a totally different way to view and use the space of military operations as they are based on total real-time surveillance and on use of the urban built environment for military purposes through bulldozing, piercing new streets and passages through existing buildings and blowing up ‘enemy’ houses. The territoriality of the Arab-Israeli conflict is constituted vertically on a tri-dimensional composition instead of horizontally on a bi-dimensional contiguity (Weizman 2002, 2007). In this way of viewing (urban) space, the built environment itself becomes a weapon of war that can be used in battles that are engaged on infinite plains, and not only on the horizontal, orthogonal one. In the light of this situation, the notions of classical territoriality become obsolete and

a clear rethinking of the nature of US “hyper power” is now required as an element within the broader re-theorization of strategic power. Instead of the classical, modern formulation of Euclidean territorial units jostling for space on contiguous maps, geopoliticians now need to build on the work of Virilio and Deleuze, to further inscribe the vertical into their notions of power” (Graham 2004c: 20).

At the basis of the IDF’s use of urban space for their operations lies Orientalist imaginative geographies depicting the Arab-Islamic as a multilayered and disordered urban maze that defies the possibility of total surveillance upon which the U.S. and Israeli armies rely to beat terrorism (Graham 2005). This alleged ‘challenge’ to total surveillance systems has triggered anti-urban feelings in the political and military circles of countries such as the U.S. Orientalist imaginative geographies of the Arab Islamic ‘chaotic’ city have often been made acceptable by the range of new ‘experts’ in urban warfare populating mainstream popular media such as retired U.S. Colonel Ralph Peters (Graham 2005), according to whom cities constitute the terrains of future wars against terrorists, infiltrated in every interstice of the ‘Arab Islamic urban maze’. Despite the critiques of the effective power of technology to beat terrorism, there has been an increasing reliance on strategies to ‘clean’ Western cities from terrorists through technology, or actually to ‘teach’ cities to clean themselves from terrorists (Graham 2006b) through increasingly developed quantitative databases about terrorist behaviour, especially using social networks theory. For example, the U.S. Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency has launched the “Heterogeneous Social Network Analysis” program, which aims to track down and manage terrorist behaviour through

the algorithmic study of complex social networks (U.S. Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (2007)).

The corpus of study about cities, conflict, and terrorism spans across disciplines, and one of its main features is that of triggering interdisciplinary dialogue between urban and political geography, critical urban studies, architecture, critical international relations and studies of political violence (Graham 2004c). In this heterogeneous constellation, two constant narratives seem to return in the discussion about the economy of images of urban destruction throughout various phases of modernity and postmodernity: the city as a new post-Cold War theatre of conflict, and the city as an age-old battleground. After identifying these types of statements within a number of scholarly works, I will illustrate how they can be useful to interpret urbicide from the point of view of its geographical specifications and its genealogies of power/knowledge, and how this is a valid stand to propose alternative imaginations of urban war in 1970s Lebanon and Beirut.

1.3 The City As Battlespace: Geopolitical Novelty, Or Urban Destiny?

Scholars in urban geopolitics have often presented the importance of cities for geopolitical and military discourses either as a recent phenomenon or as a very old one. In the first case, the rhetorical demonisation and the concrete targeting of cities are conceived as a feature of the specific geopolitical moment we live in, i.e. the post-Cold War phase, and are often situated within discourses about the global loss of territorial power of the nation state (Graham 2004b). This approach is often found in studies in international relations and political science about the appearance of “new wars” (Kaldor 1999). The “new wars” discourse describes the military and territorial novelty of the conflicts that have developed since the end of World War II and especially after the end of the Cold War, so much so that – according to these studies – totally new theoretical categories and policy strategies are required to understand, manage and prevent these types of war. Globalization and its impact on the decline of nation state power are deemed to be the main causes for the emergence of these new asymmetrical wars that involve a range of actors other than the nation state such as militias, drug cartels, terrorist cells and many others (Graham 2004c). However, critical voices have scrutinized their effective novelty and have concluded that these wars are often the

product of rearrangements of previous situations (Henderson and Singer 2002; Brzoska 2004), and – more specifically – their economic and material aspects must be considered in a frame of continuity with the Cold War era (Berdal 2003). These critical opinions, nevertheless, rarely take into account the geographical specifications of wars as a method of distinction (or non distinction) and too often use quantitative and structural approaches which tend to focus on the differences between categories such as ‘civil wars’, ‘inter-communal wars’ and so on (Gurr 1994) rather than on the particular spaces they produce. However, urban geopolitics has also put the emphasis on the qualitative distinction of post-Cold War conflicts and especially on urbicide as the feature of these wars (Coward 2006). In the second case, scholars argue that deliberate destruction has always been part of the history of cities as the other face of construction and planning (Graham 2004a; Hewitt 1983). These studies view the city as producing new relations out of destruction. Marshall Berman, for example, has underlined that “a city is an attempt at a kind of collective immortality” (1996: 175) and that cities are made by construction as much as they are destroyed and then rebuilt, setting out new ways of “city life after urbicide” (1996: 191).

Both the novelty narrative and the destiny narrative agree on one thing, the links between violence and the city have constituted a taboo for a long time and political violence has mainly been associated with abstract categories of “homeland” and “nation state”. Urban studies and social sciences, in other words, have not engaged enough with the critical analysis of urban spaces as the physical targets of violence because of “the almost complete dominance of national rather than sub-national spaces and politics within international relations and political science” (Graham 2004d: 24). On the other hand, it has been argued that, either by re-asserting the presence of urban war throughout history, or by highlighting its newness, there is the risk to normalise urban conflict (Smith 1996) and to make the city the ultimate, necessary geopolitical key to represent and manage contemporary conflicts. More specifically, this point leaves some scholars wondering “why we are heading towards an urban geopolitics and what that may be when we arrive, and how it will be different from an undefined initial geopolitics” (Flint 2006: 217). One critique to both narratives in urban geopolitics might lead scholars to wonder whether part of the studies in urban geopolitics might in reality describe a simplistic cartographic shift of the geographies of war from the nation to the urban realm (Flint 2006) rather than promoting a more refined understanding of the multiple geopolitical discourses and practices surrounding urban conflict.

Therefore, how is it possible to contribute to the studies of the relationships between urban space, political violence and global politics, without creating a series of new geopolitical truisms which would result in normalising cities as the current geostrategic terrains for state and non-state violence and in shaping systems of power/knowledge that treat the targeting of cities as “a technoscientific discipline with its own conference series, research centres, and journals” (Graham 2005: 1) – a question that a number of geographers have raised (Flint 2006; Smith 2006). It is within this tension between the need to understand contextually the specific changes in urban life brought by war, and the risk to idealize or normalize cities as the new sites of production and management of contemporary “geo-power”¹² (Ó Tuathail 1996b: 7) in the ‘new’ sub national conflicts, that my investigation on the multi-sited everyday geopolitics of the urban battle in 1970s Beirut is situated. In the following pages I will explore in more depth the links between various interpretations and applications of the term “urbicide” according to the discourses of urban novelty and the urban destiny that populates the debate about the relations between cities and political violence.

1.3.1 Urbicide as novelty.

One of the main ideas underpinning studies in urban geopolitics is that with the supposed de-territorialisation of the power of the nation state in a global world, and with the increasingly complex transnational flows putting the coherence of territorial and national discourse into question, cities are becoming the new centres of the rescaling of political violence. According to these discourses, the rescaling seems to be only one of the aspects of the “repositioning” of notions of identity, territoriality, citizenship and locality in an era of globalization. For sociologist Saskia Sassen (2003) these discourses and practices are not purely de-centred and losing their concrete specifications in a flat world of flows, but on the contrary, they are “repositioning” and creating new spaces of political enactment. In the global world “the national as container of social process and power is cracked. This cracked casing opens up possibilities for a geography of politics

12 Ó Tuathail (1996), drawing from Foucault’s theories on power and governmentality, argues that since the XVI century governmental practices have gone step by step with the creation and institutionalization of geographical knowledge and the imposition of “ordered visions of space, territory, and geography upon ambivalent lands, terrains and cultures” (Ó Tuathail 1996: 6-7). Ó Tuathail connects geo-power to geography’s scientific claim to be an objective discipline, as he argues also that “the functioning of geographical knowledge not as an innocent body of knowledge and learning but as an ensemble of technologies of power concerned with the governmental production and management of territorial space.” (1996: 7).

that links sub national spaces. Cities are foremost in this new geography” (Sassen 2003: 57). The city in the global world, therefore, becomes “one of the nexi where the formation of new claims materializes and assumes concrete forms” (Sassen 2003: 18) after the nation state and concepts such as ‘homeland’, had constituted – especially during the two World Wars – the categories through which state governments made sense of conflict and represented the spaces of military attack.

The decreasing power of the territorial nation state corresponds to the increasing visibility and strategic value of what Michael Sorkin has recently called “the city after Clausewitz” (2004: 262), where “the era of the suicide bomber” (262) produces discourses and policies of daily prevention, fear and deterrence, which involve complex ranges of actors of political violence – “drug entrepreneurs, jihadists, local liberation fronts, animal right activists, abortion abolitionist, and the rest” (262) – whose claims and spaces of power have very little to share with national territoriality in a classic sense. This line of argument is also found in the work of Timothy Luke (2004), who remarks on the inadequacy of national governments to find responses to the challenges posed and faced by specific city-based actors: “even Washington after 9/11 is not making good on its solemn promises to the American people to defend them against the nebulous threats of terrorism” (2004: 135). Building on Mumford (1961), Luke argues that although the city has always been an economically, politically, and materially strategic place where living machines can transform into death machines, globalization and state de-territorialization have brought about a re-evaluation of this urban strategic value.

In the vocabulary of the discourse about the revived strategic role of cities in twenty-first century conflicts, the word “urbicide” or “city killing” has frequently appeared, and it has even been described as one of the defining features of these conflicts (Coward 2006; Simmons 2001). This idea dates back to the early 1990s, in the wake of the wars of the Balkans. At the end of 1991, former mayor of Belgrade Bogdan Bogdanović, described as “urbicide” the co-presence of ethnic cleansing and deliberate destruction of the built environment in the actions of the Yugoslav National Army during the siege of the Croatian border town of Vukovar (Safier 2001: 422). During the sieges of Sarajevo and Mostar by the Yugoslav National Army in 1992, the word continued to be used, stirring a debate among a group of architects from Mostar about the destruction of the urban fabric in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the debate resulted in the publication of a work

titled “Mostar ’92 – urbicide” published in the magazine *Space and Society* (1993). A decade after those events, in the wake of the fall of the Twin Towers in New York City, the idea of urbicide has attracted further interest from a remarkable range of scholars who expressed their views on the impact of the events of 11 September 2001 on everyday urban life (Marcuse 2001), notions of security and fear (Davis 2001), multiculturalism (Safier 2001; Leontidou 2001) and urban morphology and infrastructure (Graham 2001). Although much variegated, these views put the stress on the specificity of post-Cold War conflicts in producing a large number of images of urban devastation, and their analysis focuses on the specific political economy of images.

Political scientist Martin Coward has also focused on the post-1990 specificity of urban conflicts and on urbicide as a peculiarity of these recent wars. His view of urbicide as the symptom of post-Cold War political violence is also characterised by a dissatisfaction towards the conventional views of the destruction of the urban built environment, which see it either as collateral damage of ‘necessary’ military operations, or as an attack on the symbolic apparatus of a culture, intended as a container of identity or – finally – as local signifiers of global geopolitical meanings. While arguing that these semiotic views of political violence against the built fabric obfuscate the complexity and specificity of material destruction as a form of violence, Coward (2002, 2004, 2006) instead conceives the built form as deliberate target (not as the representation of something else) of contemporary ethno-nationalist power projects and highlights the importance of considering the built forms themselves, including their destruction, as a possibility for opening rich and context-specific political debates:

The problem with [the semiotic] interpretation [of political violence against the built environment] is that the destruction is not treated as an event worthy of attention in its own right. Rather, the rubble is appropriated as a sign connotative of a more general concept. While urban destruction may serve as the sign for several concepts, noting this does not get us any closer to understanding the meaning of the destruction of urban fabric. [...] We deny ourselves crucial political possibilities if we simply accept those signifiatory stories, since we accept that this destruction is interesting only insofar as it connotes the dissolution of political communities or the savagery of this fragmentation. (2004: 164-165)

To enforce his argument, Coward observes that during the war in the former Yugoslavia, not only the outstandingly symbolic buildings belonging to the targeted communities were made objects of annihilation, but also common edifices such as houses, offices, shops and bridges whose connotative value was often not so evident. What was attacked, according to Coward, was, then, not only the part of highly symbolic urban texture that could have generated textual connections with wider concepts such as “nation”, “religion”, “identity”, “fragmentation”, and so on, but also any other places hosting everyday collective life, common activities, and shared values of one or of different communities that made the destruction of Bosnian urban fabric peculiar in its own right. Urbicide is used, in Coward’s case, to describe the attempt to efface *any* condition for the survival of urbanity, conceived as heterogeneity and – drawing from Heidegger – “dwelling together” (Coward 2004). Building on Coward’s arguments, we could say that the urban fabric as a whole becomes a target when it *represents and performs*, at once, the coexistence among different groups:

insofar as the dynamic of ethnic cleansing is that of the carving out of separate, ethnically homogeneous and self-determining territorial entities, it comprises a denial of common space through a destruction of that which attests to a record of sharing spaces – the heterogeneity of cultural heritage and the intermingling of civilian bodies. (Coward 2004: 158)

Through these words, Coward (2004: 167) traced what he has called the “politics of urbicide” which aims to delete any reference to urban encounters between different communities. The politics of urbicide aim to keep people separated, both physically and through their representation as ‘different’, a mechanism that is sustained by “the fiction of ethnic separateness/purity” (170). Coward aims to focus on the built environment in its own value and on its materiality as a factor that actively shapes the circumstances of conflict, rather than remaining an inert background on which events unfold.

The value of urban materiality as a target of violence in its own right returns in geographer Michael Safier’s perspective on the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. Safier has defined urbicide as “the deliberate destruction and/or disintegration of an entire way of living in a city, by means of both killing its citizens and maiming its culture of civility and diversity” (2001: 416). Safier draws attention to the symbolic meaning of the Twin Towers, but does this in a different way from those scholars who define the attack to architecture as the attack to a clearly demarcated

culture 'contained' in a precise architectural site. According to Safier, in fact, the destruction of the Twin Towers was not so much aimed at killing people who bore (in the claims of the perpetrators) a causal link to the attacks, but rather it aimed to eliminate the variegated multicultural features of the targeted place. "What is involved in urbicide" continues Safier "is the negation of all normal urban existence, both literal – in physical terms – and even more significantly symbolic – in terms of such values as liberty, civility, diversity and co-existence" (Safier 2001: 422). The result of the destruction of multicultural sites results, according to Safier, is a landscape of indistinct rubble, in New York as in Baghdad. This implies one important aspect for the contemporary understanding of urban conflicts: that there exists a too often unquestioned division made between the attacks perpetrated against 'our' cities by non-state networks of terrorist groups, and the "counteraction" (422) that is taken by Western states' victims of terrorism against 'terrorist' cities in the global South. This problematic distinction between (illegitimate) non-state and (legitimate) state attacks exposes the imaginative geographies that are at the basis of the hierarchies of places to attack and of places to protect in the maps of Western world politics. These imaginative geographies of urban destruction are based on the reductive and dangerous geopolitical binary of those who are "with us" and those who are "against us" (Safier 2001). The critique of such distinction through the study of the concrete spaces it produces opens up the field of analysis of the acts of organized violence against cities both to state strategies, as well as to non-state, localized actors, and – most importantly – to the interconnections between these contexts. For Safier it is, therefore, crucial to investigate the connections of the 11 September attacks with "other, sometimes even more devastating, attacks on cities and their citizens that have occurred in the recent (and not so recent) past in many different parts of the world" (2001: 421) from Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden, to Belgrade and Grozny. Safier, however, is also critical of the vision of urban devastation as novelty and remarks on the partiality of any view of the fall of the Twin Towers that considers it as an event without precedents or as a moment initiating a new era for the United States and for the world. Although these events had an unquestionable impact on urban planning and security, as well as civil liberties in the U.S., Safier criticizes universalistic stands that the highly iconic fall of the towers as a turning point in international politics as reductionist, naive in their approach to the genealogies and implications of the attacks and – most importantly – apologetic of that

division of the world in two sets of cities on the basis of the unprecedented and spectacular nature of that act: cities ‘under attack’ and cities ‘to attack’.

Another approach based on the analysis of the political economy of images of urban death and on the idea of spectacle (Debord 1977) has challenged the representational views of urban destruction. Retort (2005) described the recourse to exceptionally spectacular acts of violence as common to both the U.S. and al Qaida. Image, in their view, is “a specific and effective piece of statecraft” (26) in the twenty-first century, and it is part of both the strategies of Al Qaeda and of the United States, but it has also been part of televised destruction in other conflicts, such as the destruction of Stari Most in Mostar by the Yugoslavian National Army in 1992. In their review of Retort’s work, Jeffrey et al. (2007) have critically discussed the use of image as a type of capital and as a tool for control that is connected with state, modernity and terrorism, and they have connected it to Coward’s views of the destruction of the everyday material fabric of shared urban life in the Bosnian villages as a political act of urban material and rhetorical re-imagination. According to both Jeffrey et al. and Retort, the image of destruction is not superimposed on politics, but is itself a political act that intervenes (through violence) to change a specific urban political situation: “The destruction of urbanity, we would argue, demonstrates a violent spectacular politics: a denial of political practice and ‘re-imagining’ of urban space as a monoethnic landscape.” (Jeffrey et al. 2007: 214). However, Jeffrey et al. are also careful in considering this spectacular destruction as unique or unprecedented, and they invite the mapping of the multiple specifications of this spectacular kind of political violence and its place and function in the global architectures of violence. The use of spectacular violence against the built fabric is embedded in specific political processes rather than being utterly planned from above, superimposed symbolic strategy aimed exclusively at iconic portions of the built fabric.

The use of built forms as new weapons of war within a newly conceived, three-dimensional rather than orthogonal military space (see also Weizman 2007) has been widely analysed by Stephen Graham (2003), who focuses on the ways in which the operations by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) against the Palestinian people in the early 2000s involved not only symbolic and institutional buildings, but extended to daily infrastructure such as apartments, offices and sewerage. Aimed (according to the IDF) at the ‘eradication of terrorism’, particularly through the use of bulldozers in the

occupied territories, “Urbicide involves not just the demolition of homes ... but intensive infrastructural destruction” (Graham 2003: 66), which includes equipment such as roads, water tanks, power plants, communication systems,. One important point in Graham’s reading of urbicide in Israel regards how destruction can be not only an instrument of control by a dominant ethno-nationalistic actor, but also how both construction and destruction contain a large amount of preparation:

[construction and destruction] involve a great deal of planning, so that the violence and destruction achieve the desired political social, economic, ecological, and cultural effects on the “target” population and their places. All of which means that the division between urban planning geared towards urban growth and development, and that which focuses on attempts at place annihilation or attack, is not always clear. It is necessary to assume that a continuum exists connecting acts of building and physical restructuring, on the one hand, and acts of all-out organized war and place annihilation on the other. (Graham 2004a: 33)

Israeli architect Eyal Weizman (2002, 2004) places an even deeper stress on the importance of considering the contemporary everyday built environment and the organization of built forms in influencing the modalities, the effects, and the management of a conflict. When considering the Israeli tactics of domination obtained through the eviction of the Palestinian population, urban planning and management are – according to Weizman – among the primary means of achieving that goal.

The literature reviewed thus far stresses the novelty, frequency and visibility of urban targeting, but the novelty discourse is even more present in military studies and in classical international relations. A number of views in these fields, in fact, supports the view of cities as “new” axes in the space of contemporary global politics, particularly in the global South, such as in the view of Ralph Peters, according to whom:

we are entering a period when we will increasingly judge the success of cities and their environs before we concern ourselves with their mouldering states. [...] who cares about Upper Egypt if Cairo is calm? We do not deal with Indonesia – we deal with Jakarta. In our recent evacuation of foreigners from Sierra Leone, Freetown was all that mattered. For decades, we dealt not with the government of Zaire, but with the emperor of Kinshasa – and in the recent civil war in that vast African state (now renamed as yet another Congo), military progress was measured not in jungle

traversed, but in cities conquered. India is well on the way to becoming a confederation of city-states disguised as a political unity. Hong Kong will be a fascinating laboratory for the relative power of the city versus the state. [...] a global network of cities and post-cities is emerging [...] whose elites interact across borders more efficiently and effectively than they interact with the populations of their own hinterlands. (Peters 1996, html document)

In military studies, cities are being considered as the ultimate target, and the new “terrains” where future wars will be engaged (Press 1998). This implies the creation of new tools to face the frequent eventuality of prolonged combat in urban environment as Ralph Peters has argued: “the future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, high rise buildings, industrial parks, and the sprawl of houses, shacks, and shelters that form the broken cities of our world” (1996: 43). The weight of such affirmations is undeniably relevant, however, what statements like this do is to contribute to provide definitions, enumerations, and categorizations about urban violence. The city, in this perspective, tends to be represented as ‘natural’ (and therefore a-political and rid of any contextual origins) terrain for contemporary and future hegemony struggles. The city becomes an instrument for measuring the ‘new’ military power. The attack on the city becomes a drama which appears as unavoidable, bare of any contextualization and making city targeting a normalized concept.

1.3.2 Urbicide as destiny.

Besides being defined as the feature of post-Cold War conflicts, scholars have also described violence against cities as a phenomenon occurring from antiquity, and have argued that the construction and the destruction of cities are reciprocally intertwined as “cities, warfare, and organized political violence have always been mutual constructions” (Graham 2004c: 1). One of the features of these historical descriptions of the urban destiny of destruction is the stress on the attack to urban civility by actors who object to it for various reasons and in various ways.

Bogdan Bogdanović’s view that “Urbicide [...] is the intentional attack on the human and the inert fabric of the city with the intent of destroying the civic values embodied within it” (in Bevan 2005: 121) conveys the idea that cities like Vukovar, Sarajevo,

Mostar, and Dubrovnik used to have a particular “civil” way of life that was part of their cultural identity and that was embodied in their built fabric. Bogdanović, therefore, interprets violent acts as the expression of some innate hostility towards an urban way of life that the perpetrators wanted to erase. This is a view adopted by other scholars who have identified that hostility with the rural way of life and its consideration of the city as a corrupted place (Simmons 2001). However, this view of a perpetual confrontation between an introverted countryside and a cosmopolitan city is a romanticized one, as it “perpetuates a modernist myth” that considers city and countryside as two distinct and pre-existent containers of identity and culture where “the city represent progress whilst the countryside remains backward” (Coward 2006: 425). This representational binary extrapolates these two spaces from their socially and materially produced contexts, from their interaction and mutual constitution and superimposes a sweeping view on the unique geographical specifications of every conflict.

As for political violence in the history of Lebanon, we will see, the rural versus urban idea does not hold for a number of reasons. Firstly, Lebanese cities have not always been the prime objects of attack: the centre of the sectarian clashes in the mountains areas of modern-day Lebanon in the 1840s and 1860s were in fact rural villages, in which farms, fields, vineyards, village churches and private residences were the objects of destruction and looting (Makdisi 2000). Secondly, rural attacks lasted throughout the civil war in which mountain monasteries and other religious buildings were targeted when fire fronts opened in the mountains outside Beirut (Labaki and Abu Rjeily 1993). Thirdly, scholars have questioned the common discourse of Beirut’s traditional openness and cosmopolitanism and have related to the cultural vocabulary of imperialism rather than ascribing it to a pre-existent or natural predisposition of the city itself to accommodate difference. These studies have shown instead how cosmopolitanism was often circumscribed to the higher classes and in the context of joint business ventures. What instead the wider context presented was a socio-economically divided urban fabric that became increasingly entangled in sectarian struggles not only among Muslim, Druses and Christians, but also within every one of these religious communities (Fawaz 1983).

The vision of urban place as a container of culture is reinforced by the historian of architecture Nicholas Adams who, in 1993, wrote about the role of architecture as a

main target of deliberate destruction. Adams interpreted the targeting of architecture as the attempt to eradicate the presence of certain people from certain places. The former are in fact seen as belonging to an “alien culture” (Adams 1993: 389), and the places where they usually gather and conduct their public life become a target for rival groups. In his attempt to identify the parameters that constitute a deliberate attack to architecture and its cultural specifications, Adams also stresses the specificity of the city as a locus of different notions of civility that express themselves also through architecture. He in fact highlights the role of urban architecture as container of memory, culture and identity, and describes destruction as a struggle between representatives of different cultures, aimed to eliminate the Other together with the concrete signs of its presence – architecture.

There is one problematic aspect in Bogdanovic’s and Adams’ visions of the necessary relation between violence and the urban material fabric. It regards the view of the city – especially the Occidental city – as a container of civility. In Bogdanovic’s vision, the attack to the built fabric of the city is an attack to some “values” embedded in the urban space, values that are celebrated in the civil “way of life”. In particular, Bogdanovic has described the city attackers as rural people who considered the city of Sarajevo as a corrupt place. This is a view shared also by Simmons (2001) who, however, is critical about the “myth” of Sarajevo as a cosmopolitan city and suggests that its ethnically homogeneous periphery tells us as much about the Balkans’ war as the countryside surrounding Sarajevo and turning against it. This position is not only one that involves a problematic relationship between structural ideas of rural and urban environments, as we have seen previously; it also involves a problematic vision of the city itself, and of values normally associated to it: civility and citizenship, as well as their opposite: incivility. Citizenship scholar Engin Isin (2002) has extensively deconstructed the Weberian notion of city as a space of association of civil subjects. Isin brought into light the contested power struggles lying at the basis of the process of “becoming political” (4), and his genealogical study of the accepted notions of citizenship analysed how “being political” is in reality “*becoming* political”, that is to say a process of reciprocal constitution of self and others through “acts” that are immanent to the lived space of the city. Therefore, according to Isin, there is no political being that is already constituted as “citizen” outside the lived and contested space of the city: “being political means being of the city. There is no political being outside the machine” (2002: 284). What Isin means is that political subjects (those subjects who have right to the city) are socially

constructed not in isolation but in relation to those who are not political (strangers, outsiders, barbarians, aliens). Isin thus shakes the foundation of the romanticized notion of the city as a creative association of citizens by tracing the social contexts in which this idea is immanently born and by exercising a continuous “scepticism toward these harmonious and contiguous narratives given to us by citizens” (2002: 3). The result is a proposition for a new perspective on the city, not as an association of subjects who are already citizens/civil, but as the association of those subjects who *have become* citizens by struggling for the determination of what is uncivil.

Bogdanovic’s view of urbicide is one of an attack to an already constituted and immobile idea of city/civility by equally immobile non-civil subjects. His view reflects Weber’s romanticized idea of city as association. Instead, Isin presents the idea of city as a machine of differentiation, where political subjects, rather than “being” civilized a priori, *have become* citizens through differentiating themselves from the “Other” which they constituted as external, inferior and different through contested practices. In Bogdanovic’s reasoning, the built fabric that is made target of the city attackers is in its turn an exclusive and immutable referent of this culture of civility that the non-urban people want to cancel. This is an effective reasoning in itself; nevertheless, this is also a representational reasoning that deprives urban materiality of its contextually shaped reality. By instituting an exclusive association of the urban built environment with urban culture, as opposed to a non-urban one, Bogdanovic conceives the city as a container of immutable cultural references. In other words, this culture does not constitute itself *through* the urban built fabric, but rather – in Bogdanovic’s view – uses materiality as a mere background, as a pure ideal: materiality is only ‘attached’ to already predetermined and conclusive ideals, but is not constitutive of those ideals.

In Isin’s city of differentiation, the urban built fabric is neither a physical background for the struggle for affirmation of political subjects nor an idea or a value to struggle for or against. On the contrary, the built environment, “becomes an object in the struggle for domination and differentiation” (Isin 2002: 49), the element *through* which a group differentiates itself. We could then say that materiality is a constitutive agent of what is defined as citizenship/civility/city, rather than an abstract superstructure or a background for already constituted citizens. The urban built fabric therefore, for Isin, is “never simply a passive background of becoming political. It is a fundamental strategic

property by which groups, nations, societies, federations, empires, and kingdoms are constituted in the real world” (2002: 49).

Visions of cities as perennial targets of destruction have also considered the blurred boundaries between construction and destruction. In 1996, Marshall Berman presented an idea of urban destruction that included the violence implied in mechanisms of urban regeneration and planning. Berman has used the idea of urbicide to explain the dynamics of urban change in the South Bronx after the planning by Robert Moses of an expressway cutting through the neighbourhoods with consequent wide socio-economical unsettlement. In what he describes as “indirect displacement” (174), Berman has explained that landowners let the buildings decay to the point of preventing people from actually living in them. Through his analysis of this process of “indirect displacement” Berman (1996: 174) has shown how thin the line between destruction and planning is, which is a point extensively described by Graham (2004d) in the cases of Jaffa and Le Corbusier’s Radiant City.

One further aspect in the views about the co-natured presence of destruction and city, exemplified by political scientist Martin Shaw (2004), suggests that urbicide and other forms of extensive violence against a population (genocide) cannot be distinguished and urbicide cannot, therefore, be considered as a feature of the so-called “new wars of the city” (2004: 141):

it does not make sense to separate urbicide [...] from genocide, or genocide from war, in genocidal war [...] Urbicide is a form of genocide, the fundamentally illegitimate form of modern war in which a civilian population as such is targeted for destruction by armed force (153).

In contemporary social sciences, according to Shaw, theories about destruction should, therefore, not distinguish different categories of violence such as that against the built form and that against humans, but rather “grasp the unities of the relationships and the processes of violence and destruction (2004: 149). Shaw’s call for investigating the “relationships” between political violence and material destruction could seem to be echoed in 2006 by Martin Coward, according to whom human rationality is not the sole – or most important – channel to conceive reality. Coward takes one step further by arguing that, rather than acquiescing to the “anthropocentric” assumption that material devastation is subordinated to human massacre, scholars should apply a holistic view to

contemporary political violence, which is to say considering material forms and human lives as involved in the same process of targeting. Shaw's and Coward's positions, however, diverge on how to define the violence against material forms, once they have advocated a more integrated view of human beings and their environment during conflict. While Coward considers the built fabric as the "victim" of a distinct form of political violence – urbicide – Shaw argues that urbicide is an aspect of genocide and, therefore, material damage cannot be distinguished from any action perpetrated against civilians during a conflict. Shaw's explanation of what urbicide is (or is not), however, does not step beyond the modern categories of international law such as "genocide" and "civilian": such concepts might not hold in contemporary conflicts where battlegrounds are considered as "killing boxes" in which the civilian disappears as a political category and becomes a killable body (Gregory 2006b). Furthermore, Shaw's thesis does not answer some questions about contemporary conflicts that were not labelled as "genocide" by the international community, such as the Lebanese conflict in which the human and material damage, as well as their relationship, remain a vast ground to explore. Shaw has also noticed how one key to understanding the historical relation between war and the city consists in problematising the balance of power existing between the city and the nation state, as "the state was not always nation-based, and control of *urban* space has often been pivotal to the survival of states" (141) but "modernity transformed the relationship between cities and states" (142) in ways that cities would no longer be the defining knots of power and defence, but rather absorbed in and contained within the territorial borders of the nation state. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, political violence together with culture, identity, and territory was gradually framed within the semantic realm of the modern nation-states being born across Europe, and although the city continued to constitute a hub for production and administration within the state, they "were no longer the organizers of their own armies and defences" (Graham 2004c: 2) as in previous times when city-states embodied the vital political hubs of Europe.

These observations open the ground to another line of argument, which considers the city has having always been a strategic target. This view, however, argues that urban strategic value has been removed from the rhetoric of conflict and has been substituted by narratives of death located within a different frame: that of the territorial nation-state, with its poetic, ideal and disembodied sets of references (the homeland, honour, the unknown soldier, and so on) rather than the built environment of the city and its

inhabitants. Matthew Farish (2004), for example, has shown the politics of the rhetoric about atomic danger that underpinned the American planning of suburban districts in the 1950s. A rhetorical (and physical) demarcation was constructed between a decaying inner city and a lively suburbia through depictions of American inner cities as degraded, dangerous, and home to promiscuous multiculturalism, as well as by tolerating the decay of urban centres and by encouraging discourses of dispersal, decentralization, evacuation from the city cores (Farish 2004). Planners conceived the new anti-bomb suburban neighbourhoods, and they were often aided in these projects by what used to be called “social physicists”, whose knowledge of geopolitics was requested to find the “best formula” to make these centres resilient (Farish 2004). These formulas were then transformed into plans – though not always implemented – of satellite cities that were self-sufficient and organized to stand a nuclear attack, socially ordered and morphologically safe, and above all separated from the inner city by green belts. While narratives of decentralisation seemed to cancel death from American cities during the nuclear fear, Farish also remarks on the political and strategic value of these apparently innocent spatial planning devices. Hiding decentralisation behind the justification of the perilous inner city life, cities were in fact “left behind by the combinations of geopolitics and science during the Cold War” (Farish 2004: 109) not only to decay, but also, and most importantly – according to the geopolitical imagination of the time – to get hit by and absorb the bomb, and thus shield suburbia from the spread of the atomic plague.

Another type of rhetorical removal of death from the city, which resulted in obfuscating its connections with geopolitical events, was the association of urban disaster with the colonial city, and not anymore with the European modern metropolis, between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Modernity in Europe coincided with the assertion of the security and integrity of imperial metropolises from urban drama: “the demarcation between modernity and ancient, from the perspective of the Nineteenth century, between the time when whole cities were destroyed and their inhabitants slaughtered, and the time when that no longer happened” (Bishop and Clancey 2004: 56). This was possible because the imaginary of urban drama had shifted from the metropolitan centres of Europe to the colonial cities, either in the form of natural disasters like powerful earthquakes, socioeconomic plagues like famines or man-made devastations. All this could take place “in a non-European world read as still ancient and/or subject to rule by Nature (including human natures in need of taming)”

(Bishop and Clancey 2004: 56) As Sven Lindqvist (2003) has illustrated through a wide number of examples, cities such as Beirut, Damascus, Kabul, Tetuan, Tripoli, and the villages of Somaliland and Darfur, to name just a few, have undergone heavy aerial bombardments by European armies aimed at subjugating them. The use of sweeping aerial attacks unsettled the norms of international law agreed in La Hague in 1907 and cancelled the distinctions between civilians and warriors in these cities. However, such actions found numerous rhetorical justifications in the colonial imaginative geographies of norm and exception, of progress and backwardness.

Destruction in the colonial city was often explained through the rhetoric of the civilization mission of Europe towards 'the Orient'. But the colonial city was not only bombed to rubble: it was also planned to rubble. Works of demolition and restructuring of the original fabric of cities such as Algiers, Marrakech, and Beirut – within the French colonial policy – were rationalised through discourses of sanitation, beautification or by encouraging spatial expressions of modernity, order and modern discipline such as schools and hospitals, as Mitchell (1991) also showed in the case of British rule in Cairo.

These discourses of colonial modernity, often reproduced by architects and engineers educated in North America and in Europe and belonging to the notable families of the colonial city, were enacted in Beirut by the municipal authorities during the last fifty years of the Ottoman Empire and then with the proclamation of the French mandate. Since 1877, major projects involved Beirut's historic centre in the name of modernity, from transport infrastructures to connect Beirut to the rest of the territory of the autonomous Lebanese province (*Mutasarrifiyya*) created in 1860, to the construction of new governmental buildings, to projects regarding "health, embellishment, and traffic control. [This] endowed the city with 'modern' and 'civilized' attributes, i.e. Western features" (Yacoub 2005: 7) such as the construction of new markets, hospitals and schools. The thin line between devastation and planning became visible in modern Beirut: an historic photograph illustrating *Sharīh al Jadīd* (the new street), later renamed Rue Weygand during the mandate, shows, by order of the Ottoman municipality, the road pierced from the port to the markets in 1894, and the half demolished buildings along the newly carved road (Yacoub 2005: 29). Astonishingly, the building site resembles images of central Beirut's wartime destruction. On the basis of the new municipal building laws issued in 1896, governor Azmi Bey decided to start

a new turn of modernization works for Beirut in 1915. Besides demolishing the old markets or “souks” (a ceremony for the demolition was staged on 8 April 1915) and issuing three days notice warnings of evacuation before demolishing whole portions of the old city (Yacoub 2005), he had another large avenue carved in the middle of the old city, and when the French allied troops disembarked in Beirut just three years later at the end of the First World War and just one year before declaring the mandate on Lebanon, they “found a large breach in the city-centre consequence of the modernization projects. They will immediately proceed with the destructions clearing the old part of the city that was still preserved” (Yacoub 2005: 26), and with the renaming of streets transforming the Ottoman topography into a French one, preparing colonial Beirut to host the world fair in 1921, where the Beirut pavilion, despite the eclectic new architectures of the surroundings, preserved a neo-Moorish style (Yacoub 2005).

Building on Mitchell’s ideas contained in his key work on the colonial mechanisms of power in Egypt and Cairo (1991), we could say that the modernization of the urban fabric of Beirut, culminating with the hosting of the World Fair in 1921 and involving an intense reworking of the extant plan of the city, reflected the Cartesian principle of representation of the “world as an exhibition” that was applied to the societies and to the built fabric of the colonial “Orient” from Algiers to Marrakech and from Cairo to Delhi between the end of the eighteenth and the twentieth century:

the colonial city was to be constructed, like a world exhibition, as a representation set up before the mind of an observing subject. The Cartesian mind was conceived, in a similar way, as an interior space in which representations of external reality are inspected by an internal eye – in other words, again, like an exhibition set up before an observer. (Mitchell 1991: 177)

But this phase of the modern history of Beirut denotes another aspect about the constant and mutual links between the urban fabric, war and planning. The day of the arrival of the conquering French troops, Beirut presented itself as semi-destroyed by Ottoman urban modernization projects. On one hand, the French army engaged in the First World War, and all its consequent destruction put the first stone to the transformation of Beirut’s urban fabric to become a mandate capital. On the other hand, ironically, the Ottoman municipal authorities – normally engaged in construction and embellishment in times of peace – left Beirut in a condition similar to a war-torn place. This interstitial

moment, in which destruction and creation swap grounds, is a clear image of how cities and ruination have had very complex links even before the end of the Cold War.

If in Europe a romanticised idea of city as civilised and intact was the rule, the colonial destroyed city – by air bombing or by planning – constituted instead the image fitting the Eurocentric representation of ‘Oriental’ lands. This involved an epistemological division that is still with us (Gregory 2004; 2006a; Graham 2006b) between our cities – ordered, intact and to protect as such – and their cities – backward, spatially confusing, and even prone to “natural disaster against geographies already considered disordered, violent, and overly spontaneous” (Bishop and Clancey 2004: 56). Therefore, there were (and are) cities where destruction would not be considered exceptional, because they constituted (and still constitute) the exception.

This threshold between the Western “intact” city and the Oriental “destroyable” city was unsettled during World War Two when the bombing of European cities (especially in Britain and Germany) and Japanese ones involved vast scale area bombing of locations practically void of strategic targets or of remote locations from the frontlines (Hewitt 1983). Nevertheless, there is little study of the political economy of images of urban destruction during the Second World War and also in the Cold War era (however, see Bishop and Clancey 2004; Farish 2004; Lindqvist 2003). In 1983, Ken Hewitt urged scholars to explore the “terra incognita” (258) of the socio-cultural and technological connotations in the urban destruction of World War Two. Death occurred in the European and Japanese cities, but it was very rarely depicted as urban: the nation-state army and the homeland were rhetorically portrayed as the main victims and even the vision of the dead body of the soldier was absorbed into a wider idea of homeland (Bishop and Clancey 2004). Further, the detached bird’s eye perspective of the bombardier deprived its targets of any corporeality. Moreover, the atomic death by ‘vaporization’ suggested a vague and sterile idea of death to the public at the news of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which – as Linqvist remarks – were officially perpetrated as a pre-emptive action to protect U.S. cities from a Japanese invasion. Misinformation or absence of information among the American public about what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki until the 1980s (Linqvist 2003) has not contributed to imbue urban death with corporeality.

Other visions have criticized the conception of the city as a novel pivot of destruction. From an economic perspective, Mats Berdal (2003) has found elements of continuity between Cold War and post-Cold War periods within the intra-state wars and their urban implications in several African countries. Robert Bevan (2005) described the anti-urban actions of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge against the city of Phnom Penh, which de Walque (2005) – through quantitative data – proved to be a systematic targeting of urban reality. Bevan also wrote about the Maoist Chinese regime campaigns against the villages of Tibet. Matthew Farish (2004) has analysed the rhetoric of nuclear urban disaster and its connection with inner city decay and the rise of suburbia in 1960s United States. My investigation of the destruction of Beirut between 1975 and 1976 also aims to contribute to the study of these often overshadowed connections between urban place and violence between the colonial times and the Cold War.

Reviewing critically the contemporary studies in urban geopolitics and highlighting the partiality and limits of the two main discourses about the new or age-old links between war and urban place is intended to illustrate that urbicide is not a practice solely aimed at annihilating a certain “urban way of life”, as this idea originates from a certain notion of civility as co-natured to the city whose partiality and romanticized character has been widely discussed (Isin 2000). Neither is urbicide a practice confined to specific symbolic built forms, as this statement would imply a representational vision of architecture as container of a priori notions of culture (Coward 2002). Urbicide is not even circumscribed to a precise period in time or to a certain geopolitical era – for example, the post-Cold War phase and global deterritorialization – as urban destruction has often been present, but discursively constructed and producing different images in different epochs (Farish 2004; Bishop and Clancey 2004; Shaw 2004). Rather, urbicide has geographies and histories that bear multiple and complex connections to different places, eras and political actors. These multiple political geo-graphs of urbicide need to be investigated in their contextuality rather than being explained through causal relations.

In this perspective, I argue that urbicide should neither be interpreted as an ageless component of urban history, nor as a new characteristic of the most recent post-Cold War conflicts. but rather as the geographical specification of any attempt to erase an existing urban spatiality and affirm a different one. Building on Ken Hewitt’s words,

urbicide can be seen as the rhetorical and concrete configuration of one of the main characters of warfare: “the disorganization of enemy space” (Hewitt 1983: 258).

1.4 Neither Novelty Nor Destiny: Just Geography. The Built Environment As A Terrain Of Geo-Graphical Struggle.

Building on Coward’s considerations of the built fabric as a target in itself, I argue that in order to better interpret the relation between violence and the built environment, we need to disentangle its meanings and its materiality from a relation of exclusive, semiotic, representation of each other (church = Christianity; bridge = inter-communal contact), and open the ground, instead, to an analysis that conceives the destroyed place as a lived space (Lefebvre 1974), as spatiality (Soja 1996), as both materiality *and* meaning, none of which can stand alone, and in which each shapes itself *through* the other at the same time. In describing the necessity to take into account the space of social relations, Engin Isin (2002: 42) takes inspiration from Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) threefold interpretation of spatial processes as well as from Edward Soja’s subsequent work on spatiality and Thirdspace (1996). Soja considers spatiality as one of the three tiers composing the life of the being, together with historicity and sociality (1996: 71). This trialectic is formed by Firstspace (Henri Lefebvre’s “perceived space”), that is to say the material forms and objects among which social relations take place. Secondspace (Lefebvre’s “conceived space”) i.e. the space of ideas, the geometric, conceptual space of science, urbanism, planning and cartography, as well as the utopian space of artists, poets but also – I would say – ideologists. Firstspace and Secondspace can both be seen as abstract representations (Isin 2002), but Lefebvre stressed that the conceived space is “the dominant space in any society” (Lefebvre 1974) since it is in the abstractions of Secondspace that spatial orders and hierarchies are represented, thus producing “a storehouse of epistemological power” (Soja 1996: 67) superimposing on the perceived space. The third tier is Thirdspace, a concept that Edward Soja derived from Lefebvre’s *espace vécu* (lived space), “the space as directly lived” (Soja 1996: 67). Lived space or Thirdspace is distinct from First- and Secondspace, but at the same time it is immanent to them. Lived Space is both real and imagined, both perceived and conceived; lived space embeds a mixture of material and metaphorical implications, because is both corporeal and representational. Thirdspace (the lived space) is at once subject to the shaping and reshaping of imagination (Secondspace) but it also surrounds

and “overlays” (68) Firstspace, by ordering its perceived materiality into a symbolic system. Thirdspace can also be considered a ‘counter-space’ in the sense that it combines and makes reality and imagination visible in their coessentiality; it uncovers the mechanisms behind the separation between “things and thought” (Soja 1996: 68) and casts them both back into a unique flow of experience. Lived space is neither totally material nor totally imagined: it is absorbed in the event. Isin finally adopts Georg Simmel’s views on space and social relations, recognizing their major suitability for describing the spatial dynamics of citizenship and identity (2002: 44). According to Simmel, a social relation is underpinned by spatial qualities which are at the same time symbolic and material, and the formation of social groups stems on these uniqueness of spatial qualities: “to the extent that a social group inhabits a space, it possesses a character of uniqueness or exclusivity that is not normally attainable in other ways. Space becomes its defining characteristic as a group” (2002: 44).

Besides this reciprocally constitutive vision of the material urban space and its social dimensions, Michel Foucault’s idea of “repeatable materiality” of a statement (2002: 114) is also useful to frame urbicide within an idea of spatiality, intended as the uniqueness of the material-and-symbolic specifications in which social relations take place. Repeatable materiality is also ideal to explain my position with regard to ideas of the relationship between objects, discourses and human agency. In order to follow Foucault’s reasoning, we have to interpret the act of violence against the material fabric as a statement, for example, the destruction of heterogeneity and its substitution with homogeneity, that is part of a discourse, for example, Serb nationalistic politics. According to Foucault, a statement needs a material medium to be expressed – in order to extinguish heterogeneity in Mostar, the bridge on the Neretva needs to be brought down. However – and this is a crucial point in Foucault’s reasoning – materiality does not act as a purely functional conductor for a statement; in other words: the material means is not something added ‘on top’ of an already completed and discrete statement or meaning. On the contrary, materiality is a *compositional* part of that statement and, similarly, we can consider the geographical specification of the statement as one of the aspects that actively shape the statement itself: “the materiality [...] is constitutive of the statement itself: a statement must have [...] a place” (Foucault? 1974: 113). If on one hand materiality shapes the statement in very specific, if not unique, ways (the destruction of Stari Most is a particular event and this particularity had unique material specifications) then on the other hand, materiality has also the power to make a

statement repeatable (the destruction of the bridge in Mostar was only one event of a series of systematic destructions in the war perpetrated by the same actors). Therefore, the destruction of Stari Most should not be considered as a unique, unprecedented and unrepeatable event that shaped the discourse of Serb nationalism through a one-off destructive action, however, not all acts of destruction are comparable to that of Stari Most because of the specificity of its material components: the bridge, the town structure, the position of the militias, the weapons implied and ultimately the way the bridge and inter-communal social processes impacted on each other (i.e. the spatiality of the bridge). What endows an act as a statement is the fact that it becomes “too repeatable to be entirely identifiable with the spatio-temporal coordinates of its birth (it is more than the place and date of its appearance) [but also] too bound up with what surrounds it and supports it to be as free as pure form” (Foucault 2002: 117). This is the rule of the repeatable materiality of the statement, a rule that follows “the order of the constitution rather than of the spatio-temporal localization; it defines possibilities of reinscription and transcription [...] rather than limited and perishable individualities” (116). Ultimately, then, we can say that urbicide has a repeatable materiality in the sense that it can be reproduced into different specific material forms rather than being an event limited in time and place as well as in the meanings it represents. This way, the relation between violence and architecture becomes one of geographical specification, of spatiality (materiality-and-meaning), of reciprocal and articulated *constitution* and not of causal place/time *localisation*.

Beirut questions the idea that cities are the typical, deterministically locatable geopolitical pivots of post-Cold War warfare: the Lebanese civil war was fought in the last two decades of the Cold War. It also shakes the generalizing assumption that destruction happens in any city around the world since age-old times without the need to understand how violence and destruction are specifically constituted and how they acquire material specifications. Beirut, instead, allows us to appreciate those context-specific links between space and society (spatiality) that shape urbicide. It also highlights the political mechanisms that help understanding how places *become* targets rather than demonstrating that they have always been destroyable. Therefore, urbicide – more than being a fixed analytical category to ‘measure’ any urban conflict – is a component of a contextual geographical redefinition.

At the basis of Martin Coward's "politics of urbicide" (2002: 170) is the idea that the destruction of the built space does not fulfil itself merely through material annihilation, but also in the consequent creation of a new spatial configuration based on homogeneity and on the belief that this homogeneity can be maintained through spatial segregation. This configuration aims to stop encounters between different groups of people or individuals and to keep people separate physically and rhetorically. It is in this process of annihilation of existent spatial orders, and in the successive creation of different configurations based on territorial as well as ontological divisions between people, that the geographical and material specifications of urbicide reside. Through a series of material specifications (walls, fences, lines, as well as destruction itself) political projects acquire visibility and material presence. Urbicide, the deliberate destruction of the urban built space within a rhetoric and strategy of political violence, is a particular process of physical and discursive redefinition of the urban environment.

Now that we have established a clearer position with respect to the role of urban materiality in discourses of political violence, I will conceptualise this physical and discursive redefinition as a process of "geo-graphy" (Sparke 2005: xii), as well as of "geo-power" (Ó Tuathail 1996b: 1), as Graham (2004c: 24) also suggested. Building on Edward Said's (1994) notion of "geographical violence"¹³, Ó Tuathail explained the idea of geo-power as "[the] ability to impose order and meaning upon space" (1996b: 1). All but an innocent and objective science, geography is by no means "a product of nature" (1996b: 1) but rather "a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space" (1996b: 1). Implied in geo-power is the action of "geo-graphing" (Ó Tuathail 1996b), a concept that questions modern geography as an objective science and highlights its partiality, thus revealing it as "not a noun but a verb, a geo-graphing, an earth-writing by ambitious endo-colonizing and exocolonizing states who [seek] to seize space and organize it to fit [imperial] cultural vision and material interests" (Ó Tuathail 1996b: 2). In particular, the links between geography and the modern territorial nation-state reside in the adoption by the "bourgeois nation-state" (Minca and Bialasiewicz 2004: 80) of a Cartesian and geometric view over the complexity of the world, which transforms this complexity into cartographic measure: "the map transforms places into spaces, but speaks of them as if

¹³ Said defined geographical violence as the aggressive attitude, implicit in imperialist expansion, to conquer new lands by seizing them, measuring, renaming and describing their space in order to control them and shaping their space and the personhood of their inhabitants around empire's dominant vision of the world (Said 2003).

they were places, the map thus becomes the measure of all things, the reflection of what exists" (Ibid.)¹⁴. The cartographic gaze of geo-graphy contains a sort of implicit violence, which Farinelli (2003) attributes to the act of "mapping" (78) and to its reduction of the complexity of the lived world into its own complete, immobile and inflexible representation; this violence consists, in other words, in the mechanism through which

one can assign – to each thing – a precise position, a definite and unique location, and [through which] every word has one and only one meaning [...] the map does not only kill the Earth but mortifies also language because it not only freezes the object but also the way of referring to it, and therefore paralyzes also the subject. (2003: 78-79)

The only apparent absence of the ideological and socially produced contents of 'neutral' cartographic space has also been discussed by Sparke (2005: xii) who argued that there is an "usually hidden hyphen that lies latent in the word "geography" itself a name [...] for earth-writing", and that this hyphen pierces the aura of scientific objectivity of cartography, exposing the powers at the basis of any geographical discourse on space. Sparke uses this hyphenation of geography as a critical theoretical ground from which to explore "the inherently unfinished and multilayered 'graphing of the geo'" (xii) and the spatialities of these unequal power processes within a world that de-territorialization and globalization theories consider as one in which time/distance are bringing about the "end of geography" and of territoriality:

While almost all of the land of the earth has now been territorialized by states, the processes by which this disciplining of space by modern states occurs remain highly contested. From Chechnya to Chiapas and Rondonia to Kurdistan and East Timor, the jurisdictions of centralized nation-states strive to eliminate the contradictions of marginalized peoples and nations. Idealized maps from the centre clash with the lived geographies of the margin, with the controlling cartographic visions of the former frequently inducing cultural conflict, war, and displacement. (Ó Tuathail 1996b: 2)

Recent critiques of arguments about the deterritorialization of global politics and to the different theories of the 'end of' – such as Fukuyama's (1997) "end of history", and Hardt and Negri's tendency to follow the "end of geography thesis" (Coleman and

¹⁴ Translation by the author.

Agnew 2007: 333) – emphasize instead how the transformations in the spatiality of global politics do not necessarily coincide with a total dissolution of the geographical specifications of unequal power relations in a ‘flattened world’ where place-specific expressions of power fade away (Sparke 2005). Moreover, as Coleman and Agnew have argued “this [...] either/or mapping of political power – as either centred on states or de-centred in networks – prohibits a more complex appreciation of the re-territorialization and/or re-scaling of state power in late modernity”(2007: 319). In the light of these views, the city should not become the (either new or ancient) normative epistemological terrain to understand war, but rather the opposite: it is through the partial and unequal power relations of late modern wars in a globalised but not flattened world that we should interpret the complex spatiality of the contemporary city and the political economy of images of urban disaster.

1.5 Conclusion.

These ideas about geo-graphing, cartography and mapping are useful for a genealogical analysis¹⁵ of urbicide which addresses the destruction of the urban environment in the name of discourses and practices of political violence, neither as a feature of “new wars”, nor as eternally present in the nature of cities, but as an open-ended struggle for the materiality but also for the meaning of a city. By applying the idea of geo-power and of geographical violence to urban space, we can envision the city as more than a passive canvas on which contemporary violence happens or as an unavoidable eternal terrain for conflict. By analysing urbicide as an act of geo-graphing, I will attempt to disentangle the urban war in Beirut from these a priori imaginaries of city destruction, and I will instead contextualize it in its immanent material and social specifications. It is by treating urbicide as spatiality – as the product of and the tool for the assertion of “cultural visions and material interests” (Ó Tuathail 1996b: 2) – that we can grasp the role and value of the built form both as a presence shaping the course of the conflict, and as a target that is shaped by discourses of political violence. Therefore, we can consider urbicide as an in-between domain, as the interstitial moment that resides between the existence of a certain combination of power, knowledge and space and the realization of a new combination through the deliberate targeting of the built forms.

¹⁵ See Introduction, note 9.

From this theoretical perspective, it is possible to shift the idea of urbicide away from any label of newness or eternalness and conduct instead a genealogical analysis of its spaces. In the following chapter I will present the methods I employed during my fieldwork in Beirut; these make possible a qualitative analysis of the urban geopolitics of the Lebanese civil war as well as being a contribution to the study of the political geographies of urbicide generally.

Chapter 2. Urban Geopolitics Of The Lebanese Civil War: A Genealogical Reading

The ontics of violence – the lived experience of violence – and the epistemology of violence – the ways of knowing and reflecting about violence – are not separate. Experience and interpretation are inseparable for perpetrators, victims and ethnographers alike.

(Robben and Nordstrom 1995)

2.1 Introduction

The built environment in Beirut has been the site in which official and unofficial geopolitical visions of the Lebanese civil war were reinterpreted and became material. Not only did the built environment become the reflection of these visions and the site where they intersected, it was also the instrument that the militias used to reinforce their rhetoric and enact their practices. This double-sided process was particularly visible in the phase of urban close-quarter fighting between 1975 and 1976. In the following pages, I will illustrate the approaches to my positionality as a foreign researcher of past events in present Beirut and the methods I employed to explore the contested discourses and practices of the urban geopolitics of the civil war and to interpret their links with the built fabric of the city.

This genealogical analysis¹⁶ of the geopolitics of the Lebanese conflict aims at unsettling the nation-state based vision of the official statements of international foreign policy between 1975 and 1976. It does so by reading these official perspectives contrapuntally with the unofficial discourses and practices of the urban militia fighting within Beirut. Joining dominant voices together and, simultaneously, with different and ‘illegitimate’ perspectives on the Lebanese civil war, I will highlight the coexistence of multiple representations of space and politics in Lebanon during the conflict, and in particular, I will analyze the role that the urban built environment played in materializing the reciprocal shaping of these narratives during the urban fighting. I also use this contrapuntal reading in order to expand the realm of critical geopolitics’ discursive

¹⁶ See Introduction, note 9.

deconstruction beyond official written sources (Thrift 2000) and into the unofficial oral memories of the practices of fighting. By integrating the official written documents of formal geopolitics with the unofficial oral accounts produced by the urban militias fighting mainly in Beirut, I want to show how the militias' perspectives – even without being part of the formal geopolitical discourse – contributed to construct and contend meanings about international foreign policy and about the role of Lebanon and Beirut in this arena through the everyday practices of fighting. By engaging with the data contrapuntally, my attempt is not solely to displace the state-centred official geopolitical narratives about Lebanon, but also to follow their reinterpretation and re-elaboration by unofficial actors (the urban militias) in everyday settings (the urban built environment) and to show how the fighting groups produced meanings about space, power and global politics in the everyday and informal practices of warfare in Beirut beyond the territorial gaze of canonical nation state-based geopolitics.

This genealogical study aims to trace the interconnected threads of two types of geopolitical knowledge about Lebanon – one originating in the circles of international foreign policy, the other among the militias in Beirut – that are usually considered as juxtaposed, but whose intermingled rhetoric and practices about territory had their material imprint on Beirut in at least two ways. Firstly, Orientalist and modern colonial tropes about Lebanon as a container of separate sects inclined to fanaticism, and as a country always oscillating between harmony and chaos according to the sectarian equilibrium – as we will see in the next chapter – populate official foreign policy statements of various Western countries such as France and the US. In return, Orientalist tropes such as that of sectarian extremism were also used by the militias themselves to support their own points and to denigrate the adversary as “fanatic”. Secondly, official geopolitics is informed by a view of the Lebanese war which is focused on territorial nation-state boundaries, while little or no attention is given to the internal complexity of the Lebanese situation and to the networked connections of its militias with both state and non-state actors. Such a cartographic perspective in defining each other's territory and identity with respect to international affairs was also present in the terminology and visibility¹⁷ of the militias' practices and discourses.

¹⁷ Rose defines visibility as a way of displaying and of seeing images that is influenced by and imbued with certain social meanings and is, therefore, contextual: the “way in which vision is constructed” and “the ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen is culturally constructed” (Rose 2001: 6).

2.2 De-Subjugating The Geopolitics Of Urbicide In Beirut

Reconstructing the past spatialities of the urban war in Beirut involves a number of methodological considerations related to the fact that by investigating the past, there cannot be a present observation of the socio-spatial processes being questioned (Baker 1997). My aim was to explore the discourses and practices which – during the early phases of the war – re-drew the material and symbolic map of Beirut in ways that are still affecting it today, and the former militia combatants who fought between 1975 and 1976 are the surviving perpetrators of that re-drawing. I therefore used in-depth interviews with these witnesses to produce oral histories about their geopolitical imaginations and their daily relation with the urban space during the rounds of fighting. These in-depth interviews provided an original way to explore the interconnections between the Lebanese war and the urban space, something which had been attempted in sociology and architecture, but which did not rely on any primary data (Beyhum 1992; Bourgey 1985; Khalaf 1993; Moystad 1998; Nagel 2002). The in-depth interviews also provided me with an opportunity to produce original conclusions about an often understudied phase of the war and its impact on the urban space (see also Davie 1983, 1992; Habib 1984).

The militias' oral histories tell us something about the absence of urban fighting from Lebanon in official international foreign policy; in addition, the close relation of the former combatants with the built space of Beirut during the guerrilla war also provides primary data for interpreting the mechanisms by which urban architecture shaped the war and – in return – how the fighting changed the meanings attached to urban materiality. Moreover, analysing the knowledges of these unofficial actors constitutes an account of a part of Lebanese history which is still very much a controversy.

Journalists and architects were also a part of the set of interviewees. This has to do, first of all, with the fact that architects and planners could help understand some of the processes informing architecture and society in mid-1970s Beirut. They also complemented the voices of the militias, reinforcing them from different perspectives. Journalists also played a crucial role in the affirmation of militia discourses and practices, as on various occasions militia chiefs used the media to give accounts of their actions and so achieve new levels of popularity, influence and power within the city, such as by releasing press conferences.

From an early stage of access by “cold calling” (Valentine 2005: 124) in which I contacted potential participants via e-mail, the research passed to a phase in which gatekeepers provided a great deal of contacts and information. Among these gatekeepers were journalists, as, in the war, they had often covered for the local press a number of battles on which I was focusing my data gathering and, therefore, they not only witnessed the battles, but they also had contacts with a number of militia members in order to negotiate their access and presence on these sites at that time. Finally, the data gathering passed into a stage that in human geography, as well as in the other social sciences, has been defined as “snowballing” (Valentine 2005: 124). That is to say, through informal networks of acquaintances, my first interviewees then suggested further ones, and the pace of the interviews increased as I added new contacts to my list.

At the same time, I carried out archival research, particularly through local newspapers and magazines of the time, and among the militia political posters¹⁸ that are part of the special collections of the American University of Beirut¹⁹. I analyzed further visual material including graffiti, press photographs and historical images from political parties’ websites²⁰. In addition, I considered published material about the war, press articles and videoed interviews, as well as a number of statements by militia leaders.

Although I analysed the discourses about geopolitics and the built environment in the interviews and in the written texts, I also approached discursively the militias propaganda images, exploring the construction of meaning embedded in their representations of Beirut and the war, and the relations of those meanings to narratives and practices of power. The political posters are artefacts reproducing a certain experience of Lebanon, Beirut, the war, and its protagonists. They also produce meaning about the nation-states and political entities beyond the boundaries of Lebanon, such as Syria and the Palestinian territories, Israel and the U.S. Their visuality reproduces a different perspective on world politics from that of formal geopolitics and its technological abundance in military maps and other devices. Their ways of seeing (or of being capable to see) the world also expose the unevenness in the availability of

¹⁸ The technical and economic mechanisms behind the militia propaganda apparatus have not yet been the object of study, therefore, we know little about the relations between Lebanese militias and designers. A research project about the links between political activism and design is being realized by architect Zeina Maasri at the Department of Architecture and Design of the American University of Beirut, titled “Iconography and Imagery of Political Parties in Lebanon during the Civil War”. For more details, visit http://tinyurl.com/6qnk3t_page visited on 21/11/2007.

¹⁹ Written permission to reproduce material belonging to the collections is in possession of the author.

²⁰ Written permission obtained from website editors is in possession of the author.

visual technology (Haraway 1991) lying behind the scientific aura of geopolitical thinking and military cartographies. Posters, therefore, are part of this genealogical study because they also are geopolitical and they entered the production of the social and material fabric of wartime Beirut. However, the “scopic regime” (Rose 2001: 6) of the posters is also partial and constructed. It is embedded in the social practices of the conflict and their visibility is part of these processes. For example, the accuracy of their design, and the time frame of their appearance on the walls of Beirut, could be linked to the increasing organization, structuring and economic stabilisation of the militias. For this aspect, I build on Chaktoura’s (2005) study of mural graffiti, and particularly to her observations on the use of stencils rather than free drawing, the design of more refined fonts, and the repetition of phrases and slogans as the material translation of the passage from irregular rounds to continuous war, of the stabilization of the front lines, and of the radicalisation of the militias. Therefore, looking at the geopolitical visions that these visual sources convey, and highlighting the social processes in which they are embedded, is also an element for counteracting the scientific claim of a geopolitical discourse that overlooks the complexities of these sites of production of meaning during the conflict.

The unofficial geopolitical knowledges of the war in Beirut reinterpret and re-enact some of the discourses that are present in official foreign policy statements about Lebanon. To explore the official geopolitical vision of Lebanon in this phase of the war, I chose to analyse statements released by the governments of the United States, France and Israel, as well as the Vatican. The statements regarding Lebanon that the representatives of these states gave present a number of aspects that I chose to highlight as particularly indicative of at least two things. Firstly, these states continuously overlooked the complex situation of the civil war in Lebanon in favour of a more territorial-state-based rationale of the war, which consisted of elaborating scenarios involving other states of the Middle East such as Israel and Syria²¹. Secondly, Orientalist and deterministic approaches to the sect in Lebanon are constantly emerging from these statements. These cultural and political narratives, as we will see, bear the legacy of colonial policy from late nineteenth century Lebanon, and it creates a ‘return effect’ for

²¹ The urban space of Beirut was indeed considered by the White House in 1976 – but with the exclusive purpose of planning the evacuation of the American embassy after the killing of Ambassador Francis Meloy in the city (White House 1976b).

which the Lebanese themselves represent their society and individuals as belonging to pre-determined sects by birth.

These are obviously not the only statements that were present in international foreign policy at the time, and it would be indeed crucial to analyse the geopolitical visions of other states, for example, the perspective of Russia on the evolution of the conflict in Lebanon and its visions on a potential escalation in the Middle East. Nevertheless, accessibility to the online archives of Russian governmental institutions has been limited for language reasons and because of the classified character of the documents. The perspective of other Arab countries – such as Syria, Egypt, Jordan or Saudi Arabia – whose representatives were often involved in diplomatic activity with Lebanon, and eventually became involved militarily through the entrance of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF), should also be taken into consideration and possibly compared with the geopolitical visions on Lebanon in the governments of the Western block (reasoning according to the Cold War code of the time). However, a comparison would fall well beyond the space and scope of this analysis, and could constitute the bulk of a future critical geopolitics study. One interesting aspect worth mentioning, though, is the remarkable number of statements that the representatives of these governments released – as compared with the minimum number of statements in the case of other key members of the Western block such as Great Britain and Italy.

The official material considered in this study includes minutes of meetings, parliament addresses, speeches to the United Nations and televised interviews dated between April 1975 and November 1976. I accessed these texts through the online archives of the Ford Library²², the French government, the Vatican and the Knesset (the Israeli parliament). All documents are unclassified, that is to say of public domain, except for a number of passages in the White House meeting minutes between President Ford and his entourage. I analysed these texts by encoding their contents, thus finding a number of main discursive strands, with the help of the qualitative analysis software Atlas TI, which I also used to analyse the interviews, posters and the other texts linked to the non-state actors in the war. Although they share the same geopolitical code (Agnew 1998) related to the Cold War equilibrium and the avoidance of a Middle East major conflict that might lead to a confrontation with the USSR, the statements have presented specificities related to the particular foreign policy agenda of this or that state, and to

²² <http://www.ford.utexas.edu/>.

their different historical connections to Lebanon. They also highlight the more or less articulated local knowledge of this area of the world in the official circles of other countries, such as the U.S., as compared to the higher familiarity that emerges from the statements of a government that was already highly involved in the area. The statements of the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Perez, for example, show a detailed and complex local knowledge of Lebanon, as far as the PLO's logistics and strategies are concerned, because of the Arab-Israeli wars and the relocation of the PLO from Jordan to Lebanon in 1972 and the consequent creation of a specific infrastructure for guerrilla warfare against Israel from the Lebanese territory. Numerous passages in the French representatives' speeches and interviews stress, instead, the role of France in the creation of Lebanon as an example of coexistence and peace in the Middle East. This is a clear reference to the French mandate²³ era, the modernization of Lebanon and the politicization of the sect as part of the modern rationality of government, which contributed to create the image of Lebanon as a container of different, pre-existing sects oscillating between overt hostility and peaceful coexistence, although the implications and modalities of this patterns are not mentioned. The statements of the Pope and his emissaries emphasize the situation of the Christians in Lebanon and the long-term relations of the Maronites with the Roman church; the attempt at inter-religious dialogue in a number of meetings between the pope and the representatives of the Lebanese communities reinforces the taken for granted vision of Lebanon as a country that is formed by sects which constitute the only way to political legitimacy in the country. This sectarian determinism is also applied by the White House representatives, who consider the Lebanese feuds as one of the main scales of the war and the natural consequence of a country made of sectarian feudal actors. In the American geopolitical mind, although the causes and modalities of this aspect are not explored, Lebanon finds itself in an intricate situation that discourages any attempt to solve it according to logic. Exploring these different but interrelated geopolitical knowledges tells us more about the discursive and material effects of the past geographies of violence in Beirut.

²³ According to the League of Nations (the 1918-founded institution which would later become the United Nations) a colonial mandate is a land that is "inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world" (League of Nations 1945) and therefore needs to be put under the tutelage and government of a European nation which will lead the country to independence.

2.3 Representing the Geographies Of Conflict In Beirut: Violence, Memory, And Legitimacy

I arrived in Beirut on the first day of Ramadan in 2005. During four months, I lived in Ras al Naba, a predominantly Sunni and Shiite Muslim neighbourhood, located less than one kilometre south of the reconstructed downtown. The neighbourhood lies between two main roads departing from the city centre towards the south and the south-east, and it is delimited to the east by the French Embassy, the French Cultural Centre and the Jesuit-founded Saint Joseph University, to the south by the National Museum – built during the French mandate – and by the new General Security building and the Tribunal Courts. This has made the neighbourhood – at least until recently²⁴ – a quiet enclave of residential buildings, schools, small businesses and mosques between these institutional buildings. But during the civil war, Ras al Naba was heavily involved in fighting due to its proximity to the former main fire line – the Green Line²⁵.

The visibility of the neighbourhood at my arrival expressed the overlapping of successive different political phases in the country. Banners, graffiti and flags for the al-Murabitun party²⁶ filled the space, and – aside from them – a more recent visibility had developed in the area made of posters, writings on walls, windows, balconies, at shop entrances and in the streets. They all commemorated the late Prime Minister and his bodyguards who died in a roadside bomb attack on February 14th 2005, a day which is still considered as a turning point that plunged the country into a phase of political instability unprecedented since the end of the civil war.

I shared a flat at the top floor of a modern building with a local landscape designer and painter. Being in constant contact with a Beirut resident was meant to add safety to my stay during a tormented political phase for the entire country. Since the killing of former PM Rafiq Hariri, several car bombs had taken the lives of intellectuals, journalists and politicians. Furthermore, four pro-Syrian army generals at the head of the Lebanese

²⁴ Clashes broke out in the neighbourhood of Ras al Naba in February 2008 between pro- and anti-government groups (www.naharnet.com).

²⁵ The term is borrowed from the Israeli military vocabulary indicating the armistice line that in 1949 put an end to the first Arab-Israeli war after the declaration of the UN partition plan for Palestine in 1947.

²⁶ *Al Murabitun* (the sentinels) is the short name for the Independent Nasserite Organization in Lebanon. This is a party which turned into a leftist-progressive 3000 men militia during the civil war led by Ibrahim Koleilat, and its religious component is mainly Sunni Muslim. During the war, they were allied with the Palestinian resistance within the *Harakah al Wataniyya* (the National Movement) led by Druze leader Kamal Joumblat. They participated in fights in Beirut, Sidon and Tripoli. In the following phases of the war, they clashed against pro-Syrian and shi'a parties, before turning to secrecy. Their return to the public political scene was announced through a press conference in Beirut in 2001.

security services had just become destitute upon accusations of plotting the Hariri murder, thus leaving the security and intelligence services in the country in the midst of a power vacuum. Finally, the nearing results of the UN enquiry into the Hariri case was infusing tension at an everyday level. The boundaries between research and everyday life – especially in a politically tense context – are not at all clear-cut. Taking into account one's political and cultural positionality is part of realising – as a critical social scientist – not to have a 'view from nowhere', but on the contrary, to recognize the contextual character of research and its embeddedness in the social processes that shape our ways of knowing (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

2.3.1 The banality of violence: everyday fieldwork practices in Beirut

A researcher's knowledge is contextual and produced, by no means neutral and fixed, and the political and ethical frame to which the researcher refers when designing her investigation can be often put into question, or even upset, during cross-cultural fieldwork. Even the language and words that explain the researcher's activity emerge as contested ideas that are not immobile, but embedded in the "cultural worlds that confer meaning upon them" (Desbiens 2002: 3). This is not a unilateral process of cross-cultural 'discovery', as both the researcher and the participants are entangled in a relational production of meaning in which they reassess or reaffirm their views of the world. The research process, in other words, is informed by all their unevenness and complexity of the fieldwork circumstances (Sidaway 1992). These reflections on the constituted character of research and on the discrepancies between meaning, representation and expression (Katz 1994; Rose 1997) can become a particularly evident value when the research experience takes place in a tense socio-political environment (post-Hariri Lebanon) and while working on a historical, but similarly tense, topic (the civil war). In this situation, the experience of violence and the study of it are very often meshed (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 4).

While in Beirut, I had the sensation of continuously being in the field, even when I was not interviewing my informants or researching in the library; I shared Cindy Katz's (1994) interrogations about where the boundaries between what constitutes fieldwork and what does not actually reside, and about the need to be sceptical of binary categorizations such as researcher and researched and research and everyday life. The

constant intellectual and emotional involvement in the agitated political situation of Lebanon, the occasional sympathy or perplexity about some of the views of the participants, and the existential distress that these views occasionally brought, revealed all the fuzziness of these distinctions. The tense political situation at the time of my fieldwork also often affected my way of doing research: it impacted on movement, on asking or not asking sensitive questions or even interrupted the research activity. Violence constituted a crucial aspect of my research topic and it provoked different reactions in my interviewees including interest, resistance, suspect, support or even encouragement to write about the recent past of Lebanon, as one interviewee once requested “we want our country to be a case study for other cities and our people to represent to other people in the world how they suffered” (interview with journalist, 25 October 2005). Violence also affected my positionality triggering ethical questions related to the interviewees’ occasional unethical, offensive or even openly violent statements against political adversaries such as when one of my interviewees declared:

on the day in which the war was there, we were decided: the Palestinians? Stop!
And until the present day, I tell you, I will not shoot one Lebanese, whoever he is,
but Syrians or Palestinians, I would massacre them willingly: [it is] irresistible!
(interview with Kata’ib former fighter, 22 November 2005).

While interviewing, it was like assisting in a current-day spoken performance of the wartime violence. As the past continued to spill once more into the present, I could experience what Arendt described as the “enormous role” (1970: 8) of the intertwining of violence with human life, and its contextual rather than transcendent nature; its ‘banality’ of being a component of everyday negotiation of identity rather than as a symptom of undefined and a-historical fanaticism (Robben and Nodstrom 1995).

2.3.2 The spaces of memory in Lebanon

Producing an historical account is a process of mediation between sources, audiences, and the positionality of the author (White 1993: 5). In other words, history is not the straight-forward result of simple accuracy in unveiling historical facts that pre-exist as discrete and unchanging unities and only wait to be discovered by the researcher. The production of what we call history cannot in fact be separated from the social process in which it is produced. Michel Foucault (2002) illustrated this post-structural approach to

history and memory by despoiling them of their aura of abstraction and by immersing them into the worldly dynamics between power, knowledge, social processes and the documents that they constantly produce, approve or de-legitimize, so that: “the document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked” (Foucault 2002: 7). Following this, dealing with events that the militia members reproduced in the present time is a complex representational, political and methodological matter as it requires a critical approach about how the past is re-elaborated in the present accounts of the interviewees, and in return how the present situation in the country may have influenced their witnessing.

In Lebanon, memory is a largely contested terrain because of its relation with an established official history – since there is no official historiography yet about the civil war – is still controversial. My use of the militia memory to reconstruct the sites in which official and unofficial geopolitical knowledges impacted on the urban built environment and created new spatialities is part of the attempt to read contrapuntally the official and commonly accepted visions of the modern history of Lebanon that recur in the official geopolitical accounts, which depict the space of Lebanon through unquestioned narratives that the memories of the militias at the frontlines integrate but also unsettle. These circumstances belong to a national context in which there is no agreement about the official historiography (and, therefore, about the responsibilities) of the events of the war. The government is enacting a form of collective amnesia in this respect. Education, for example, a crucial site of power/knowledge behind the production of national history, reflects this policy: in Lebanese schools, the textbooks used in the history curricula stop narrating at the beginning of the 1970s (Fattah 2007). In 1991 the general amnesty law²⁷ passed a rule of “no conqueror, no vanquished” for the end of the civil war and freed those responsible for the atrocities of the years 1975-1990 from any legal repercussion, thus freezing every quest for responsibility and exactness about the circumstances in which 150,000 Lebanese citizens lost their lives, were injured or simply disappeared (Labaki and Abu Rjeily 1993). With about 20,000 people missing or unaccounted for (Who/Emro 2000), but not yet declared officially

²⁷ The Law 84/91 of 27 August 91, promulgated by PM Omar Karame’s government, frees of any legal responsibilities all the crimes committed before 28 March 1991, the date of the official ban of the Lebanese militias. The full text (in French) can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/68st7q>.

dead in order not to unleash the inheritance procedures which would be extremely costly to the state financial balance, sectors of the civil society are asking for the truth, but remain practically unheard (Yehia 2000; Khodr 2005).

This situation has led to the lack of a common perception of the country's past regarding the war and some aspects of the phases previous to it, allowing the development of a kaleidoscopic historiography, a contested zone where every religious and political group has its own version about their history, their role in the country and among the other religious communities in Lebanon. Reflecting on this point, George Corm once argued that in Lebanon, during the war, "the last of the militiamen [...] could become a historian and enact history" (Corm 2005: 41).

Not only is there, since the end of the war in 1991, no agreed historical vision of the war and of the country's history after it, but also the war and its memory are reinterpreted and performed in a myriad of different modalities of which none is declared as compliant to an official version of the facts at a national level. In this contested arena where a collective narrative about the past has not yet been constructed, and is still a controversy, past and present ideas about identity and difference, enemies and friends, danger and security, can continuously spill into each other, both in the accounts of the people I interviewed and in the archive documents, as well as in everyday expressions of political activism such as in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Kata'ib youth during public demonstrations on Martyrs' Square on 3 December 2005.
Source: photograph taken by the author, Beirut, December 2005.**

This picture, taken on Beirut's Martyrs Square at the funeral of MP Gebran Tueni who died in a roadside bomb attack in December 2005, is an example of how past histories spill into present territories and how these histories are performed and expressed in textual as well as non-textual ways. In this photograph, young members of the Kata'ib party walk on Martyrs' Square holding a banner depicting their late leader, Bashir Gemayel, in militia garments and holding a machine gun, evidently at the time of the civil war. A soldier of the Lebanese army, who embodies the State and the legitimate use of violence, and – potentially – the institutional version of history, stands just some metres behind, while two aged people (who could easily represent the generation who fought in the civil war) sit and watch the young demonstrators passing by. On Martyrs' Square, the supporters of the "March 14" anti-Syrian front – including the Kata'ib – gathered to protest against the wave of political assassinations that rocked Lebanon since former PM Rafiq al Hariri's death in February 2005. Together in one space, Martyrs' Square, these individuals embody the contested nature of history and could also be seen as a warning about the positionality that critical research needs to acknowledge when writing about the Lebanese war and its history in the making. In Lebanon the past constantly spills into the present. My account of the Lebanese Two Years' War also questions where and how the past violence and the present one overlap and which spaces they produce and how these spaces are connected with the violent practices of the Two Years' War.

2.3.3 Remnants of the civil war: the participants as witnesses

Memory and historical knowledge can rarely translate into unproblematic attitudes and plain statements. Telling the witness' painful and/or traumatic experience presents a tension, a gap between the common notions of ethics together with the attempts to represent and conceptualise this experience, and the corporeal (and non-representational) affective expressions of the witness (Harrison 2005), which often cannot be summed up through the categories of language.

These aspects have also the effect of displacing the assumptions in which the researcher can be caught up when her participants come from traumatic past experiences, and reveals problematic for one's positionality in the field when trying to 'tell' these experiences mainly through interviews. Ballinger (2003) has shown this very well in her

study of the ways of representing history and memory on the two sides of the border between Italy and former Yugoslavia, where the processes of boundary-making between the Italian and Yugoslav nation states during the First and the Second World War provoked the diaspora of the Italian population of the Istrian peninsula, dividing it into those who remained in what was then Yugoslavia and those who fled to Italy. Ballinger not only noticed that the creation of the new state boundary between Italy and Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War produced very different reproductions of the “true” history among the exiled and among the remaining Italian community, but also that these multiple ways to represent history and perform memory in the present mobilized divergent ideas of the identity and territory within two parts of the same community and created a series of discrepant representations of each other. As a researcher, Ballinger was often “caught in the middle” for constituting the channel through which the two sides of the community could convey the “true story”, despite her focus on understanding “the operation of memory” (Ballinger 2003: 5), rather than produce a definitive chronicle of events.

One recurring thought while interviewing my research participants was about the ways in which the remembrance of the war would affect and inform the interviewees’ expression of past events today, both in their words and in their corporeality. Above all, I questioned whether the representation of their experiences required me to draw on a realm of knowledge which goes beyond words and language. In different interviews, participants told me that in order to analyze and understand the attitudes of the militias at the time of the war, one needs to have had a first hand experience of the event. It was, in other words, as if those events were real, but even too real and difficult to be fully understood by anyone who was not present²⁸. The witness had cut the link between verification and comprehension. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben has explored the tensions in which historical research is entangled when investigating a particular type of historical account: the witnessing (Agamben 2002). Agamben has structured his analysis around a series of intrinsic absences in the figure of the witness and in the structure of the witnessing itself. There is in fact a missing link between what the witness describes as the event – an irrefutable fact testified for the knowledge of an audience – and the possibility for the audience to actually grasp the essence of that event. The structural disjunction of the witnessing consists of the fact that there is no

²⁸ According to Agamben, the banality of evil defined by Hannah Arendt (1970) does not refer so much to the commonness of evil, but to its concrete and worldly, but nevertheless incomprehensible nature.

coincidence “between verification and comprehension” (Agamben 2002: 12) of the event to which the witnessing refers: one cannot negate the fact, but one cannot – and need not – understand it.

Another intrinsic aspect to witnessing that I needed to consider was a fundamental “lacuna” (Agamben 2002: 13) on behalf of which the witness speaks. The real, “whole witness” (164), according to Agamben, is the dead one. Therefore, what in reality the survivors do is speak on behalf of the “whole witnesses” who cannot tell anymore. This void is what Françoise Lyotard (1998) used as his contentious departure point to problematise the authority of the witness and, ultimately, the authenticity of the witnessed fact itself (who can tell us that the gas chamber existed in Auschwitz if its only real victims are the dead?). The lacuna of witnessing, the non-said, is instead – contrarily to Lyotard – accepted by Agamben in order to resolve the dilemma of authenticity and to use witnessing as a valuable source of critical historical enquiry. He considers the witness not as an ultimate informant, but as a *remnant* of the event and of those who lived it fully but who cannot testify it. The witness also recognizes the impossibility to reach authenticity intended as a full correspondence between verification and understanding, which might lead to conceptualize and crystallize the events through fixed ethical abstractions. Rather, Agamben invites to abandon the attempt to find an ethical consistency and instead listen to the discrepancies and the non-compliances, the non-coincidences, and to recognize the immensely worldly, and, therefore also immensely incomprehensible, nature of violence.

Although it is not my intention to engage fully with non-representational theoretical and methodological approaches at this stage, these conceptual premises serve to better situate the research data in the slippery context of the narration of past experience.

2.3.4 Situating dismissal: cross-cultural research and the legitimacy of the researcher

While researching in developing areas, the authority and legitimacy of the researcher to represent difference can be put into discussion by the suspicion of reaffirming colonial inequalities (Spivak 1994). In this situation, the researcher’s positionality and legitimization to represent is associated with a suspicion about ‘Westerners’ writing on the ‘non-Western’ world and about the consequent reproduction of colonial tropes in

their writings (Spivak 1994). In order to manage this problematic positionality, researchers are called to engage with reflexive critique and to recognize themselves as partial subjects whose position is informed by their wider cultural environment of the studied area. Sidaway (1992) has argued that it can also be problematic to assume that ‘insiders’ can have a better understanding of their own social reality compared to a foreign researcher, as this view can lead not only to third-worldist assumptions, but also more generally to a structural belief in the existence of a truer or better knowledge.

In Beirut, during a taped interview in a café of the neighbourhood of Ashrafiyya, the participant, a former Christian militia fighter, remarked that unless I lived the events of the war I could not, or better I should have not tried, to comprehend the facts and the experiences of the people involved in them:

No, No, don't try to understand, don't try to regard this from your point of view ...
I have been saying all the time to the French when I was in France, and we discussed for a long time and I believe in science and everything, but there you have to live it to be able to analyze it, otherwise the analysis remains a superficial one within a discipline, rather subjective and very specific. You can analyze X's attitude. You cannot analyze the general attitude (Anonymous, 22 November 2005)

On the one hand, statements such as this one indicated some hesitation in the participants to concede legitimacy to my work, which provoked no little disillusion during my fieldwork days. On the other hand, research is also about dealing with the uneven power relations within the studied social processes, and thus with the impossibility to provide conclusive accounts that are free from partial views. There is no such thing as a unique and ultimately legitimate truth waiting to be discovered and possessed by the researcher, but rather there are a series of research results that are dependent on complex conditions and constraints in which the “messy business” (Rose 1997: 314) of research takes place. The recognition and relevance of these accounts instead lie in the ability of the researcher to narrate empirical data by positioning him- or herself with respect to these constraints at the same time and by dislocating specific assumed aspects. The “overlaps in meaning” (Smith 1996: 164) generated by the different knowledges at work in a cross-cultural research process can transform into openings and new interrogatives. As Robert Young argued regarding where the right to tell postcolonial histories is situated, “the difference is less a matter of geography than where individuals locate themselves as speaking from, epistemologically culturally and

politically, who they are speaking to, and how they define their own enunciative space” (Young 2001: 62). By working reflectively on the interpretive interstices between positionality and authority, I could reframe my discomfort when dealing with the critiques to my legitimacy to write and tie the relevance of my results to the politics of my positionality, rather than to binary divides such as insider/outsider.

2.4 Conclusion

In Beirut, past violence intermingles with the present urban materiality. The built environment of Beirut perpetuates the mechanisms of territorial and religious rivalry that redrew the map of the city for almost two decades. The overlapping of these past and present geographies can be illustrated in at least two cases: that of Damascus Street and the political geographies of language.

In my first afternoon in Beirut, I took a walk around the neighbourhood while Muslim families gathered in their houses or at small tables arranged outside the corner shops to break the Ramadan fasting. I walked towards the eastern part of the neighbourhood, closer to the French embassy, and I reached Damascus Street and the stationery shops around Saint Joseph University’s social sciences campus. Damascus Street, or *Rue de Damas*, stretches from the downtown area and continues until the south-eastern periphery, leading to the inner Bekaa Valley in the south east of the country, and eventually to the Syrian border and all the way to the Syrian capital. Along this road one can find the traces of the changing territoriality of modern Lebanon from the 1830s onwards and along this spine cutting through the city one could interpret the spatiality of a hundred-fifty years of Lebanese history from the last decades of Ottoman rule to the institution of the French mandate, independence and the civil war. Although started much earlier, Damascus Street’s construction was accomplished in 1863, when the Ottoman province of Beirut and the administrative district of Mount Lebanon were deeply influenced by Western economic enterprises, and when a network of modern communication and transport infrastructure was rapidly organized between the Mediterranean coast and the Syrian hinterland by European – mainly French – investors (Al-Salibi, 1969; Salibi, 1988) who traced Damascus Street on the existing imprint of the caravan’s tracks trading with the inner lands. During the independence era, this street used to mark the boundary between two of the three electoral districts of

municipal Beirut: one located to the east, one to the west of it, and one coinciding with what today is the downtown area. The civil war started in the suburbs that extend on each side of the street in the southern periphery, and Damascus Street became the main fire axis along which the rival militias fought and advanced until they reached the city centre in late 1975. Eventually, it became an abandoned no man's land that connected the east and the west of the city in correspondence with a number of designated passages along its north-south course.

As I walked, I noticed empty lots covered with wild vegetation, partly ruined buildings, and the washed-away marks of political graffiti especially on the Jewish cemetery walls. The physical ruination of this strip of land cutting through the city continues. Destruction which still persists along the peripheral stretch of the street is an example of how the built environment has been an active element in the political and geographical redefinition of Beirut and how it had been at one time the expression and the tool for affirming contested sectarian discourses.

Language also manifested these political geographies. I walked down for a short stretch in the direction of the city centre and stopped at a stationery shop. It was located on the eastern side of Damascus Street – which during the war constituted the first Christian outposts close to the Green Line. After a conversation that took place in Arabic and Lebanese, the shopkeeper said, in English: “By the way, you'd better not speak English around here”. The use of English and French in Lebanon is tied to its colonial past. These languages have had a historical association to the different religious communities whose sense of sectarian identity the colonial powers fostered, shifting family-based, cross religious alliances towards a sectarian pattern of social relations, as we will later see. This was made possible through cultural, economic, and political practices of affiliation between certain powers and specific groups on the basis of their religion, such as the ‘friendship’ between French and Maronite, and between English and Druze (Makdisi 2000) which materialized in institutions such as education, care and businesses. For example, the two main universities of the country, the English speaking American University of Beirut (once the “Syrian Protestant College”) and the Francophone Université Saint Joseph (founded by the order of the Jesuits) are the direct reflection of the colonial cultural shift to Western, modern education and discipline (Herzstein 2007; Makki 2006).

Although, since the seventeenth century, Western missionaries – Jesuits, Lazarists, Capuchins and later, Protestants – took part in the local education then managed by local clerics, it was only with the emergence of the political interest and presence of the European powers in the Oriental question in the nineteenth century, that so called “free schools” were opened outside the supervision of the Ottoman civil authorities. Formed within the loose local administrative power (Tarazi Fawaz 1994) in the declining Ottoman empire, the free schools were the institutional expression of the affiliations that the European powers developed with the local elites, mainly with the Druzes – favourite allies of Britain – and the Maronites, considered under the protection of France. As George Corm underlined with regard to the colonial competition in the Levant²⁹, to its entanglement with religion and with anti-Islamic antagonism and to its implications for the local social imaginary and practices

France [...] was not present in Lebanon under laic garments, but as a privileged daughter of the church and, through this title, protector of the Christians against the “fanaticism” of the Muslims. England, herself, was present as the one trying to unite the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire; its Protestantism served her as a reformist showcase, of secular ideology and above the local religious communities and their antagonisms. (2005: 27)

Increasingly, the sectarian configuration of power became hegemonic, with education and the use of foreign language contributing to the further social and sectarian polarization of the modern State of Lebanon in the making.

The contemporary use of English and French must, therefore, be interpreted in its relations to Lebanon’s colonial past and to the “culture of sectarianism” (Makdisi 2000) that was produced within the changing social context of late-nineteenth century Ottoman Lebanon. Language became not only a means of education, but a tool of communal identification with a foreign power and thus one of the technologies through which the power relations between European powers and the local population took place. The vicinity of the shop to the university might have informed the shopkeeper’s statement. Saint Joseph, after all, is a trilingual University where French, Arabic, and English are

²⁹ The Eastern Mediterranean region.

equally considered as its institutional teaching languages³⁰. Despite this, it is not the point here to investigate the truth of the vendor's words or the ultimate causes of his actions. Rather, we need to understand *how* was it the case that his statement has become a significant and accepted one, one that could make sense in that place at that moment. This means to question which processes connect the colonial past and the culture of sectarianism, and ultimately their consequences in the civil war, to their contemporary territorial reproduction in the urban materiality.

The political geographies of contemporary Beirut have been shaped by the cultural influence of European colonialism and the consequent politicised use of foreign languages such as English and French. Considering all this, what – in the case of the shopkeeper's advice – might sound as a simple pragmatic indication to make myself understood more effectively, acquired a political meaning and at the same time it politicized my way of speaking. It also problematised the fact that certain areas of the city speak mostly, or preferably, one of the two colonial languages rather than the other, and, ultimately, it reproduces Beirut's past geographies of conflict.

These illustrations taken from my fieldwork are indicative of the geographies of violence, memory and contested history that have shaped and continue to shape the urban space of Beirut. It is to these geo-graphs and to their historical links with the presence of colonial power in nineteenth and twentieth century Levant that I will turn in the next chapter. This next step will serve to illustrate the connections between modernity and its practices of power and the social processes that were already in place in the area in the last decades of Ottoman rule. Drawing strongly from postcolonial approaches in the literature on Lebanese history, I will specifically address the links between the colonial redrawing of Lebanon's map according to the principles of modern territoriality and the affirming and institutionalisation of sectarianism between the first half of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth.

³⁰ <http://www.usj.edu.lb/decouvrir/index.htm>, page visited on 5 March 2007.

Chapter 3. A Spatial History Of Sectarianism In Modern Lebanon (1830-1975)

Living within a world of signs, [Europeans] took semiotics to be a universal condition, and set about describing the Orient as though it were an exhibition.

(Mitchell 1991: 14)

The fifth stage, which lasted from the Nineteenth century to the establishment of Greater Lebanon, was the colonial period, in which the Western powers used al-ta'ifiyya³¹ to promote their own interests. In the early twentieth century, the sixth stage, "al-ta'ifiyya" became part of the history of the country, [and] has become real, [though it] remains hidden from sight behind [the] disguise [of such] twentieth-century concepts such as nationalism, scientism and democracy.

(al Sayigh 1955, in Firro 2003: 50)

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how politico-sectarian divides have shaped and are still shaping Beirut's space. In the following pages, I will focus on the historical links of these geographies with colonial powers in nineteenth and twentieth century Lebanon. In this chapter, I will analyse how the idea of 'sect' developed, translated into territories and produced two apparently conflicting imaginaries of coexistence and rivalry between Lebanese religious communities.

These aspects are in great part a product of practices and discourses of colonial modernity, and I will illustrate how they became the dominant factors for political legitimacy. My argument is that sectarianism is not only intimately linked and nurtured within modernity and colonialism, as a number of scholars have previously argued (al-Sayigh 1955³², Makdisi 2000 Firro 2003, Tarazi Fawaz 1994), but that the representation

31 The noun *tā'ifa* (religious community, sect) originates from the adjective *tā'ifiyy* (multi-communal/communal). Palestinian scholar Anis Sayigh employs a twofold use of the concept: on one hand, he intends "multi-communal society"; on the other hand, he uses with the meaning of "confessional society", i.e. a society whose multi-communal features have been politicized by interested actors that Sayigh calls *al-tā'ifiyyūn* (for more details, see Firro 2003: 49).

32 Sayigh talks of *al-tā'ifiyya al-'aqadiyya* (ideological confessionalism) to define the political instrumentalization of multi-religious society in the area of contemporary Lebanon between the nineteenth century and 1920. In this phase, confessionalism was consecrated as political institution and

of Lebanon in sectarian terms is also a product of a specific conception of territory that emerged within Lebanon's colonial past. Apart from the physical seizing of overseas lands by the European empires, colonialism is also a complex mechanism of power that encloses the colony in an epistemological sense. This "power to colonize", Mitchell argues in his study of the deployment of the colonial technologies of discipline and control in nineteenth century Egypt, consists of "the spread of a political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real" (1991: ix).

The geography of the Mediterranean Levant has changed from the consolidation of the Ottoman Empire to the aftermath of the First World War. Before the birth of the nation-state of Greater Lebanon, the term *Jabal Lubnan* (Mount Lebanon) was used in different contexts: it indicated the mountain range behind the coastal towns of Beirut and Sidon which, until the 1830s, belonged to the Ottoman provinces of Syria (*Sham*) and Tripoli (*Trablussham*). *Jabal Lubnan* then took the name of *Jabal al Shūf* (*Cebeli-i-Duruz* or *Durzi Dagi*) in the south and *Jabal Kisrawan* in the north. These two regions – between 1839 and 1860 – constituted the region of the double lieutenancy (*Kaymakamayn*), one Druze, one Maronite (Figure 2, p. 88). After 1860, the two lieutenancies were united into the autonomous province (*Mutasarrifiyya*) of Mount Lebanon (or Small Lebanon, Figure 3, p. 91). In 1920, the territory of the *Mutasarrifiyya* was then merged with the province of Beirut, Sidon and part of the province of Damascus, to form the mandate of Greater Lebanon, within the boundaries which we presently know (Figure 4, p. 95).

In this chapter, I will analyse the ways in which the sect was represented spatially from the 1830s until the country's independence from the French mandate in 1943. The historical account in this chapter, together with the analysis of a number of episodes preceding the beginning of the war that are addressed in Chapter Four, will draw out important connections between the development of the sectarian discourse, its cartographic and cultural translation and the spaces of political violence in Beirut between 1975 and 1976. I will then assess these connections in the context of the war in Chapters Five and Six.

pervaded the threads of the democratic political process thus becoming naturalised within Lebanese power sharing and political life (for more details, see Firro 2003: 49-52).

3.1.1 The refuge and the battleground: the sect and modern taxonomy

The recent cultural and political history of Lebanon – and especially its capital Beirut – has often been depicted using a double pattern of tolerance and rivalry between its religious groups (*tawāʿif*). Images of Lebanon and Beirut as a refuge for coexistence and – at the same time – as a container of distinct “races” have been applied extensively, from European Orientalist travellers’ accounts³³ to contemporary scholarly works. In her critical study of cosmopolitanism and economic networks in nineteenth century Beirut, Eastern Mediterranean studies scholar Leila Tarazi Fawaz (1983: 114) describes it as “the city that had once been a refuge”, a place whose growth and economic prosperity had developed in higher measure than other Mediterranean ports, mostly thanks to trade and joint ventures between local notables and merchants regardless of their religion. Alternately, Fawaz argues, Beirut gradually became a place where sectarian tensions developed, much sharper than in other Lebanese cities, so much so that “by the beginning of [the twentieth] century, Christian-Muslim clashes were so common that rarely did a week go by without an assassination, or a year without a riot” (115)³⁴. Historian Usama Makdisi (2000), in his study of the discursive construction of sectarian political identity in late Ottoman Lebanon, illustrates how modern colonialism produced what he defines as a socially constructed “culture of sectarianism” through a double imaginary of Lebanon as a container of distinct and homogenous religious groups and as a land where these different communities could also peacefully co-exist in the name of the principle of balance between them. This double-tier imaginary is also evident in Middle Eastern studies scholar Albert Hourani’s (1976) interpretation of the changing political culture of Lebanon. Hourani’s theory verges around the two ideologies that he defines as “ideology of the mountain” and

³³Eighteenth and nineteenth century European travellers to the Levant depict Beirut as lying at the meeting point between East and West. Beirut appeared as a place of harmony for those travellers who wished to discover the origins of Europe’s supposedly Christian roots. Alphonse de Lamartine described the Mount Lebanon range overlooking the city as a site of connection between East and West: “these are the Alps under the Asian sky” (1843, in Khalidi 2003: 22, author’s translation), and Gerard de Nerval wrote “This is Europe and Asia blending into each other with soft caresses” (1843 in Khalidi 2003: 53). However, they also represented Beirut as a place where religious communities are natural and eternal facts. Later, Maurice Barres, just before the beginning of the First World War, described it as a “saraband of races” (1923 in Khalidi 2003: 58).

³⁴In her chapter on Beirut’s sectarian relations from the mid-nineteenth century, Tarazi Fawaz (1983: 116-117) gives an extended account – based on sources collected in local archives – of escalating episodes of violence and murder between the Muslim and the Christian communities in the city. She also points out other ways of enacting sectarian contested identities, especially among the urban rich: the creation of schools (such as the Christian Maronite *Collège de la Sagesse* created in 1874), of hospitals and charitable foundations (for example, the Sunni Muslim Maqassed benevolent society funded in 1878), and of cultural and social institutions, many of which still operate in Beirut.

“ideology of the city”. Until the creation of Greater Lebanon under French mandate in 1920, according to Hourani, the Maronite idea of sect as an equivalent of a nation prevailed in the mountainous regions of late Ottoman Lebanon. After 1920, however, the political culture of Beirut and of the other cities of the Lebanese coast prevailed on the mountain ideology and nurtured an urban imaginary of Lebanon as a country where different religions coexist in peace next to each other, stating their presence but accepting plurality at the same time:

the urban idea of Lebanon was neither of a society closed against the outside world, nor of a unitary society in which smaller communities were dissolved, but something between the two: a plural society in which communities, still different on the level of inherited religious loyalties and intimate family ties, coexisted within a common framework (Hourani 1976: 34).

This double imaginary is common to the Western representations of other areas of the late Ottoman Empire, as well as of other Mediterranean cities. It can be regarded as the result of a constant tension between the attempt of separating itself from a chaotic Orient, and the will – at the same time – to draw a controllable order out of that chaos. Through his analysis of the performance of cosmopolitanism in Smyrna, Georgelin (2003) illustrated how these two imaginaries belong – besides to specific local processes – to the colonial vision of the Orient in the form of narratives of archaic chaos (the ‘mix’ of people) that nevertheless can be framed only by giving it a meaning. In Smyrna, this epistemological tension produced specific spaces and practices situated between an elitist cosmopolitanism and a mounting ethno-nationalism. Smyrna’s urban scene daily enacted self-representations of cosmopolitanism and coexistence – especially in the town’s markets and port – but hid homogenous social hierarchies in its residential quarters. There was a tension between what the Occident has depicted as an idealised ‘oriental’ amalgam of races, and its modern “passion for the taxonomy of the human race” (Georgelin 2003) that sought to create order out of that chaotic amalgam. Ultimately, this tension influenced the materiality of the urban space. Ethnonationalism, according to Georgelin, insinuated in Smyrna within this tension, and produced the ‘contradictions’ of co-existence and rivalry between groups that we find also in the politico-cultural history of Beirut, as well as in the socio-economic history of other cities of the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean such as Trieste and its contested

narrative of cosmopolitanism and class cleavages under the Austrian empire (Ballinger 2005).

The sectarian image of the Lebanese society is, therefore, a modern one (Makdisi 2000). Starting from the first half of the nineteenth century – during what the European powers described as a phase of administrative decadence and territorial weakness for the Ottoman Empire ³⁵ – the sect became an aspect of the governance of the Lebanese mountains (which later would become the Mount Lebanon province) by both the Ottoman authorities and the influencing European powers. This governance based on the religious sects produced a bipolar imaginary of inter-religious tolerance and hostility: the image of the mix of races that populated the Orientalist imaginary had its own reverse in the fact that distinct religious groups were defined and mapped out by the colonial authorities in the same way as the physical characteristics of the area, its administrative boundaries and its transport networks. Lebanon still depends on this type of governance; according to Makdisi (2000: 163) Lebanese political and social life are based “on a myth of communal homogeneity – that there is such a thing as a Maronite or a Druze nation that can or should be represented – and on a myth of traditional religious tolerance and harmony”. This myth determines the incapability to contextualise sectarianism as a culture, rather than idealising it as an *a priori* situation. Therefore, it is almost impossible to critically assess those mechanisms of power that, at a precise point in history, began to frame Lebanon in sectarian terms. Makdisi takes the argument further by stating that the impossibility to question the idea of sect is a deadlock which condemns Lebanese society to be repeatedly haunted by religious violence. Building on this point, I will try to unpack the concrete mechanisms of power lying behind the idea of sect from the point of view of the spaces that these mechanisms produced. I will then link the sectarian geographies with the violence that modern Lebanon has experienced.

35 See for example Çırakman (1996) who presents an account of the European cultural imaginary of the Ottoman Empire highlighting how European narratives depicted it at once as hostile (terror) and weak (the sick man of Europe), presenting contradictions rather than monolithic descriptions. Tarazi Fawaz, as well, shows the partiality of the idea of decline by relating it to the Eurocentric vision of centralised territorial power distributed capillary within a bounded territory: “the Ottoman empire, far from being an “Oriental despotism” aspired for most of its history to a loose and subtle form of suzerainty over far-flung territories. Before the Tanzimat reforms [...] the Ottoman with the Safavids and Mughals could not have achieved or sustained centralised bureaucratic rule as we understand it today [...] the Eighteenth century saw the gradual loss of real power from the centre to the regions and accelerated processes of social class formation within regions. The weakening of the power of the Ottoman [...] did not entail, however, a more general social and economic decay. Decentralisation, rather than decline seems to capture better the broad historical trends of the Middle East [...] in that period (Tarazi Fawaz 1994: 2).

3.2 The Sect: A Laboratory* Of Modernity (1830-1920)

Defining what constitutes modern Lebanon is a complex matter because as a political entity with this name it only came into being in September 1920 with the declaration of the State of Greater Lebanon under French mandate. Some authors (Salibi 1965) distinguish (modern) mandate Lebanon from Ottoman Lebanon on the basis that only with French colonialism did Lebanon acquire the political structures of a modern nation-state. Some other scholars – on whose theories I will draw in this chapter – focus, more interestingly, on the phase between the administrative reforms of the Ottoman Empire, the *Tanzimāt*³⁷, and the outbreak of the First World War. These scholars consider it a phase of reciprocal influence between the Ottoman authorities, the European powers and the local chieftains of the Mount Lebanon province. In this process, European-inspired governance of the sect affirmed itself as dominant and deeply changed local practices and discourses about identity, history and territory.

There are two major assumptions when it comes to relating modern Lebanon and sectarianism: firstly, that the religious sect is a given fact, an ageless characteristic of Lebanese society and an a priori entity that is abstract from the social process. This assumption nurtures a second one which represents the sect as a pre-modern – or anti-modern – entity. Leila Tarazi Fawaz (1983) has unpacked the first assumption about pre-existent religious identities by pointing out how specific, embodied processes – such as the mechanisms of punishment and change in social prestige that intra-faith conversions in nineteenth century Beirut triggered – have been obfuscated by generalisations about an over-represented Christian-Druze-Muslim ageless rivalry. Fawaz distinguishes between religious violence (between Muslims, Christians and Druze, the main religions in Lebanon) and sectarian violence (i.e. between members of different credos in the same religion, such as Maronite and Greek Orthodox within Christianity) and remarks that the stress put on a pre-given, abstract separation between the main religions misses out on the contingent and daily development of discourses

³⁶ The idea of the colony as a modern laboratory is also used in the case of colonial Morocco by Minca (in preparation).

³⁷ The Arabic word *Tanzimat* means “reorganization”. Inspired by European modern ideals penetrated in the Ottoman Empire through the Western education of its latest Sultans, this set of administrative reforms is contained in the *Gülhane* decree promulgated by the Sultan Abdülmecid in 1839. The decree lays in the European-inspired discourse about the Ottoman Empire’s political decline, and it consists of a centralizing restructuring project aimed at avoiding territorial loss by reforming the imperial administration. It institutes obligatory conscription, modern education, and proclaims all Ottoman citizens equal in front of the Sultan’s law. The principle of equality abolished the previous system (*millet*) based on the full right to political participation of the Sunni Muslims, as opposed to the Christian and Jew communities, who were subject to taxation and were not considered as full-title citizens.

about sectarian identity and, therefore, does not explain the grounded mechanisms whereby religious or sectarian violence is triggered: “emphasizing hostilities between Christians and Muslims, or Christian and Druze, or Druze and Muslims, misses the point that, until the end of the Nineteenth century, sectarian hostility in the city was as much within as among the major communities” (Tarazi Fawaz 1983: 108). This focus on the Muslim/Christian/Druze divide is, in other words, one that privileges a representation of Lebanon that draws only on official sectarian policies – especially within the colonial mandate – but overlooks the relational production of religious discourse.

Accepted and unquestioned assumptions about ‘ethnic’ identity and violence have informed (or misinformed) foreign policy strategies towards a number of other countries besides Lebanon (see for example, for the case of Bosnia in Campbell 1998). Writing about the war in Bosnia, Malcom (1994) argues that

the biggest obstacle to all understanding of the conflict is the assumption that what has happened in that country is the product – natural, spontaneous and at the same time necessary – of forces lying within Bosnia’s own internal history. That is the myth which was carefully propagated by those who caused the conflict, who wanted the world to believe that what they and their gunmen were doing was done not by them, but by impersonal and inevitable historical forces beyond anyone’s control. And the world believed them (xix).

We need, therefore, to conceive and interpret violence in its contextual specificity, “not outside the realm of human society [or] as a devolution into a seething ‘proto-’ or ‘pre-cultural’ sets of behaviours” (Robben and Nordstrom 1995: 3), and we also need to abandon a mythical view of violence as a fatalistic chain of events that is determined by undefined forms of ‘hatred’.

3.2.1 The sect in the imaginative geographies of the Orient

Makdisi’s work (2000) unpacks the second assumption which describes Lebanon’s sectarian politics as un-modern and ‘tribal’. Sectarianism – according to Makdisi (2000) – played instead a decisive role in the modernization of Lebanon and was not the cause of Lebanon’s detachment from modern statehood and of its ‘decline’ into un-modern, irrational fanaticism. Sectarianism can be seen as one of the aspects that placed Lebanon on the path of becoming a modern nation state; this has much to do with the social and

political changes which occurred from the mid-nineteenth century in the area of the Mediterranean Levant known as Mount Lebanon, at the time in which the “Oriental question” attracted the gaze of the Western powers toward these lands.

Colonial attention to Mount Lebanon was expressed through the “pen and paintbrush” of Orientalist travellers, intellectuals and artists before the “sword and the musket” of the French colonial troops (Makdisi 2000: 16). These “imaginative geographies” (Gregory 2004) – the fruit of travel reports, literary and art works – assigned moral values to the colonial space that in return re-shaped conceptions of what constituted ‘Western’ or European civility. Since the 1830s, the cultural experience of modern imperialism in Lebanon was shaped by the contested interaction of different sets of power/knowledge: the European diplomatic authorities and religious missions, the Egyptian army invading the Levant in the 1830s and the Ottoman authorities trying to reinforce their hold on their lands in the name of centralised territorial control through the *Tanzimāt* inspired by Europe.

The tradition of the travel to the Orient continued to nurture the cultural knowledge of the spaces of the Levant, which since the 1830s became one of the main questions for imperial expansion and also one of the greatest preoccupations of the geographical societies across France as well as elsewhere in Europe. European imperial states were present in the Levant not only through commerce, industry, infrastructure and planning, but also through education, religious and cultural institutions such as schools, hospitals and benevolent associations; in other words, imperialism enacted a “technology of colonialist subjectification” (Ashcroft et al. 1995: 426) through the creation of ‘modern’ institutional spaces of knowledge and discipline. The introduction of modern ways of viewing, performing, and managing the self and the political in late Ottoman Lebanon was very much a “gentle crusade” (Makdisi 2000: 15) aimed at regenerating hearts and minds of the indigenous population, not only exclusively through religious doctrine, but also by changing several aspects of everyday life from education, to inhabiting, to care³⁸.

38 Makdisi offers a well documented range of examples about the introduction of modern science, medicine and other everyday modern devices in late nineteenth century Levant by the Jesuits and other religious institutions: “(Western) furniture, education, medicine, and knowledge” (89). Secular education, by far preferred by the local notables, was still administered by the clerics, who on one hand sought to satisfy the demands of the local elites by providing laic education, but on the other hand piloted the affluence to this laic education along sectarian lines, so that, for example, Catholic and Protestant missionaries would try to attract different parts of the local communities: the Protestants focused on the Druze, while the Jesuits tried to win the hearts of the Maronite Catholic (Makdisi 90-91).

A peculiar spatial discourse was taking shape: the mountainous Ottoman province—located at the physical and imaginative periphery of the Ottoman Empire due to its relative autonomy from the Sultan in Istanbul which came to be seen by the French as a “refuge”. This area was conceived as an ancestral, biblical haven of salvation from the hegemony of Ottoman Islam. Its slopes were viewed as an exceptional space onto which the European economic and cultural imaginary could project its most sought-after ideals. The autonomy of these mainly non-Muslim, mountainous lands from their Ottoman surroundings contributed to the European representations of the Druze and Maronite communities who inhabited the area as the incarnation of liberal or even revolutionary ideals which were popular back in France. In the European view; however, the similarity of the mountain people of the Levant to Europe was prevented from flourishing by the (alleged) Ottoman decadence; in line with the civilizing imperial mission aiming to bring the indigenous people on the path of modernity, the Europeans felt they had the right – and the duty – to intervene and redeem the Levantine people from the Ottoman obscurantism.

The cultural imaginary of the French civilisation mission was also a double one. It consisted of a vision of Mount Lebanon as a land to export the French revolution and to liberate the local communities against the ‘obscurantism’ of Ottoman Islam through rational, enlightened and republican ideals. This vision was embodied by French traveller and geographer Volney. Conversely, it viewed Mount Lebanon as a refuge for post-revolutionary restoration. In this second view, French missionaries and aristocrats who resettled in the Levant made Lebanon their shelter from revolutionaries, Judaism, freemasonry and Islam (Makdisi 2000).

3.2.2 From genealogies of loyalty to cartographies of the sect

The cultural appropriation of Lebanon by the European states was not unilateral and all-encompassing: it produced networks of power that linked the European colonizers with the local notables whose benevolent attitude gained the Europeans’ protection. However, the ways in which local communities of notables and their loyal subjects perceived themselves did not always corresponded to the ways the Europeans envisioned nor their ways of relating to each other. As a matter of fact, as Makdisi (2000) points out,

Although Druzes and Maronite often lived in the same village, shared the same customs and owed allegiance to the same notables, they were nevertheless described separately in Western literature and, therefore, were imagined and experienced separately in Mount Lebanon. The various explorers and missionaries constructed [...] a discourse of Mount Lebanon's tribal characteristics, say of Druze bellicosity, which was largely self-referential. (23)

Within the context of the Tanzimāt, the traditional social relations of the provincial notables (*muqatā'ji*), with the common people (*ahāli*) inhabiting their lands and with the Ottoman authority began to change. Before the Tanzimāt, in fact, the feudal lords exercised power of taxation and maintained the order autonomously from the direct power of Ottoman Sultan. Within this sphere of autonomy, the mountain chieftains had extended their power on the basis of lineage, social prestige and wealth. The spatiality of pre-Tanzimāt Mount Lebanon can be described using Makdisi's (2001: 31) definition of "genealogical geography". These personal ties produced specific networks of power in which what was legitimate was "more a function of personal loyalty between protector and protégé than an attribute of coercion or impersonal authority (Khalaf 2001: 65). Also the relations between the ruling families were structured around personal and inter-religious ties; this reflected spatially in the fact that the borders between the chieftains' lands were more like negotiable buffer zones rather than clear-cut territorial demarcations (Makdisi 2000).

Since the curbing of the Egyptian invasion of 1831-1840³⁹ and the consequent fall of the Emir of the area Bashir Shehab II, ally of the Egyptians, various actors strived to affirm their own vision of a restoration of order, an order which had been brought by the promulgation of the Tanzimāt in 1839. The Ottoman authorities tended to envision the modern contribution of the Tanzimāt in a secular sense through the principle of equality of the subjects in front of the law. Much differently, the European powers – in the light of their cultural imaginary of the sects of Mount Lebanon – had a different vision of the modernity implied in the Tanzimāt: they read the restoration of order in a sectarian sense. The modernity of the Tanzimāt project consisted – in the vision of the European powers – of visualizing the space of Mount Lebanon as one where religious internal differentiation had to be removed because it was irrational and uncivilized, in favour of

39 Mehmet Ali was the Ottoman vassal in Egypt. In 1831, rebelling to Ottoman obedience, he sent his son Ibrahim Pasha to invade Syria and Mount Lebanon, under the vessel of "modernisation". His domination – brought to an end by British, Ottoman, Russian and Austrian troops – lasted until 1840 and led the local communities to several upheavals against his power.

a more 'rational' territorial layout. This attempt to erase the 'ambiguity' of religious differentiation is what we could see as the geo-graphing of Lebanon. The idea of modernity intended as territorial homogeneity is clearly expressed in a speech given in 1845 by former British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston before the House of Commons about the social situation in the Lebanese mountain, as reported by Makdisi (2000):

When such men [sic] are intermixed, as they are in Lebanon, occupying the same village, dwelling on the same land, constantly meeting in the same town, it evidently requires a vigorous hand, a powerful head, a strong, determined will, together with sound judgment, to repress the tendency to disorder which must exist in such a state of society. (78)

In the European imaginary, the reason for the clashes of 1840 in Mount Lebanon was the internal differentiation of the Lebanese towns, which contained members of different religious sects. The solution was envisaged in the territorial separation of the religious communities from each other by creating spaces where sects could live 'orderly' side by side, rather than sharing the same space, which was perceived as a cause of chaos by the Europeans. The local notables also had their own interpretation of the meaning of 'order' implied by the reforms: they began to act as intermediaries between the European powers and the Ottoman authorities – as they had traditionally been between the Sultan and the commoners of Mount Lebanon – but this time (adopting the European interpretation) they acted in the name of their sect and deemed themselves as the bearers of a tradition formulated through the language of religious communities.

Within these different interpretations of what order and modernity meant, and within the social unsettlement that the Tanzimāt produced, the sect gradually became the new pattern of representation of the political landscape of Ottoman Mount Lebanon. In much the same way, the sect became the language through which one conceived and represented modern Mount Lebanon.

In Ottoman and French mandate Lebanon, the modernization of the local society was enacted also through geo-power. In the colonial context, geography was employed to know and to govern lands that the Europeans viewed as ambiguous, disordered and irrational which needed to be orderly visualised and to be better controlled. Despite attempts to present their activities as purely scientific and detached from politics, the

geographical societies in France were also sustained through their consensus and formal affiliations with colonial politics and with the imperial military and bureaucratic apparatus (Lejeune 1993). Colonial geo-power worked to produce panoramic accounts of the colonies through annual reports (Lejeune 1993) which mapped out resources and peoples as well as re-naming their places, thus producing an epistemological – and not only a physical – seizing of the colony, which Edward Said (1994) has explained in terms of a “struggle over geography” engaged in an affirmation of colonial material and cultural interests. The modernity of the new techniques of governance in the Levant consisted also in the cartographic project aimed to represent these colonial lands as these practices “sought [...] to impose ordered visions of space, territory, and geography upon ambivalent lands, terrains, and cultures” (Ò Tuathail 1996: 7).

Tied to the vision of the Oriental space as chaotic is a representation of Oriental (or Islamic) history as purely functional to the Western one: Timothy Mitchell (1991) recalled the idea of the “past greatness and present backwardness” (169) of the colonized, and of the Arab world in particular. The colonizing power of imperialism worked also through establishing and being able to naturalise certain representations of a linear path of history that had been traced by the West and that the colony was bound to follow. Imperial representations of the colonized world turn “space into time” (Agnew 1998) by labelling the colonized peoples as ‘backwards’ and, therefore, ‘uncivilized’. In Mount Lebanon religious and territorial homogeneity became part of a modern episteme as opposed to an un-modern, uncivilised one. The ‘incivility’ of the people of Ottoman Lebanon consisted in living in what were seen as ‘spurious’ religious groups in the same place, and this internal difference is what the imperial representations of Lebanon tried to ‘unscramble’ by representing it as a mosaic of mappable, contiguous religious entities. As Mitchell argues, imperialism brings an epistemological order to the colony, an order that “appear[s] to overcome internal difference, and set up the different as something outside” (1991: 171). Differentiation, according to Godlewska (1994), is what imperialist geo-power tries to eliminate in favour of cartographies providing a comprehensive visual (and epistemological) grasp of the colony:

The critical link between imperialism and modernization lay in the argument that what was local or regional or indigenous was demonstrably inferior, and indeed an unacceptable obstacle to the national and supra-national uniformity that was the

primary benefit of imperialism. Diversity was associated with degeneracy and uniformity with civilization. (Godlewska 1994: 50)

In nineteenth century Mount Lebanon, the emergence of sectarian spaces was the product of a set of different and contested interpretations of modernity. In particular, the local elites were gradually changing their vision and representation of political and social legitimacy from notability and social prestige to religious belonging. A new geographical imagination for Ottoman Lebanon was being gradually constituted where – in the long run – religious groups would shape their own political identity.

3.3 The Sect and Modern Territory (1830-1920)

I will now illustrate how the territorial changes in Ottoman Lebanon were shaped by a modern type of governance based on the differentiation of subjects through the lens of the religious sects. In 1841, sectarian clashes broke out between Maronite and Druze notables in the mountains of the Chouf, which constituted the dominion of Emir Bashir Shihab. These clashes need to be considered within the power vacuum which was left by the end of the Egyptian invasion and the fall of the Shihab emirate, as well as in the unsettling transition from a society of notables to one of citizenship based on territory. The violence that erupted in 1841 was one related to lands and privileges, but the ways in which the Tanzimat framed the ideas of territory, privileges and citizenship, gave these events a new turn. After the fall of the emirate, a number of Druze notables exiled from the Lebanese mountain during the Egyptian invasion returned to reclaim their lands in the region of the Chouf in the village of Dayr al Qamar, but in the meantime the Maronite ruler had redistributed those lands. At this point, both the Maronite and Druze appealed to equality, order and to the Tanzimāt in order to solve their land dispute. But the idea of “restoration” – which implied also the return of “legitimate” land ownership – was formulated in different ways among Maronite and Druze notables. Once the pre-Tanzimāt social distinctions of lineage and loyalty were dissolved, the sect became the terrain upon which to construct those new discourses of legitimacy. Thus, a quarrel for land that erupted in 1841 near the mountain village of Dayr al Qamar, sparked a three-week siege that developed into a sectarian slaughter (Churchill 1862). The novelty in this type of violence was about the prevalently sectarian character of the strife and about the appearance of territorial ideas of “communal balance” and “communal haven” that

started to emerge between 1840 and 1860. During these events, Druzes killed Christians with whom they had had relations of loyalty in previous epochs. As Makdisi (2000) reports, the Druze brought with them to Dayr al Qamar some people from other villages – but Druze – to support them in the fight. The genealogical geographies based on non-sectarian dynasty enacted through place were erased in favour of sectarian belonging:

communal boundaries were shifting: religion was detached from its social environment and treated it as a cohesive, exclusivist, and organic force; neighbours suddenly became potential enemies (Makdisi 2000: 65).

The modalities of the political and sectarian violence were seen as a product of the shift from layered genealogical hierarchies that were non-sectarian and were developed in a shared place, to sectarian divides that were being increasingly rationalised until their partition through contiguous territories.

3.3.1 Containing the sect: the double Kaymakam (1839-1860)

In order to stop the clashes, the Ottoman authorities, in close collaboration with European diplomats, partitioned the area into two bordered territories on the basis of the religion of their inhabitants: two lieutenancies (*Kaymakam*) with the Road to Damascus (the same one which cuts through Beirut) acting as the borderline between the two (Khalaf 2001). One lieutenancy, south of the Road to Damascus, was Druze, the other, on the northern side of the boundary, was Maronite. In the southern area of the Maronite lieutenancy laid a series of ‘mixed’ villages. Two lieutenants were chosen from two influential families from each community⁴⁰. Until its abolition in 1858, the double lieutenancy could be seen as the territorial component of a sectarian discourse that was born from the interaction between European imperial modernity and different traditional social practices. This discourse narrated the different sects as discrete categories which had to be given a spatial coherency. Both military and commercial maps employed population counts based on religion, to draw new maps of Lebanon which took the sect and its spatial distribution into account (Figure 2, p. 88).

40 Haydar Abillama (Abu I Lam') became the Christian governor; he belonged to one of the three families owning the title of Amir in Mount Lebanon besides the Arslans and the Shihabs (Khalaf 2001: 68). Ahmad Arslan was named the Druze Kaymakam; the Arslan family also belonged to the circle of the emir families of the mountains (Salibi 1965: 64; see also 66-77 for more details on the administrative organization of the Kaymakam system from its creation until 1858).

In this configuration, the notion of 'coexistence' became a key concept to explain relations between sects: the double imaginary of distinct but pacifically coexistent religious communities of Lebanon acquired a material presence. Nationalist ideals began spreading among the communities of Mount Lebanon amid occasional sectarian clashes and population transfers between the mixed villages of the Druze lieutenancy. The sectarian and territorial partition reflected the modern colonial idea of European 'rational superiority' above the ambiguity of the multi-religious spaces of Mount Lebanon. Increasingly and more extensively, either through the European power apparatus or through the Western-inspired governance of the Ottoman authorities, the spatial and political constitution of Lebanon acquired a sectarian character marked by circumscription, enclosure and boundary-tracing that, especially in the occasion of the sectarian clashes in the 1840s, contributed to consolidate new spaces of identity and alterity, of danger and safety (Makdisi 2000). Another phenomenon contributed to the production of sectarian political subjectivities in post-Tanzimāt Mount Lebanon: as – in 1840 – the Druze nobles had attacked their own servants calling upon the help of other Druzes even if they came from other villages, now – in 1860 – the Maronite commoners threatened to topple power of the notables in the name of their own religion. The insurgency took place in a climate of economic restraint after a crisis in the silk trade. The new networks of silk production saw the French turning Lebanon into a country exclusively for exporting already processed silk rather than for manufacturing it as well. Many inhabitants, were deprived of their main source of income and suffered from the new type of economic dependence of Lebanon on Europe, especially France, and were penalised even more by the taxation exerted by the notables.

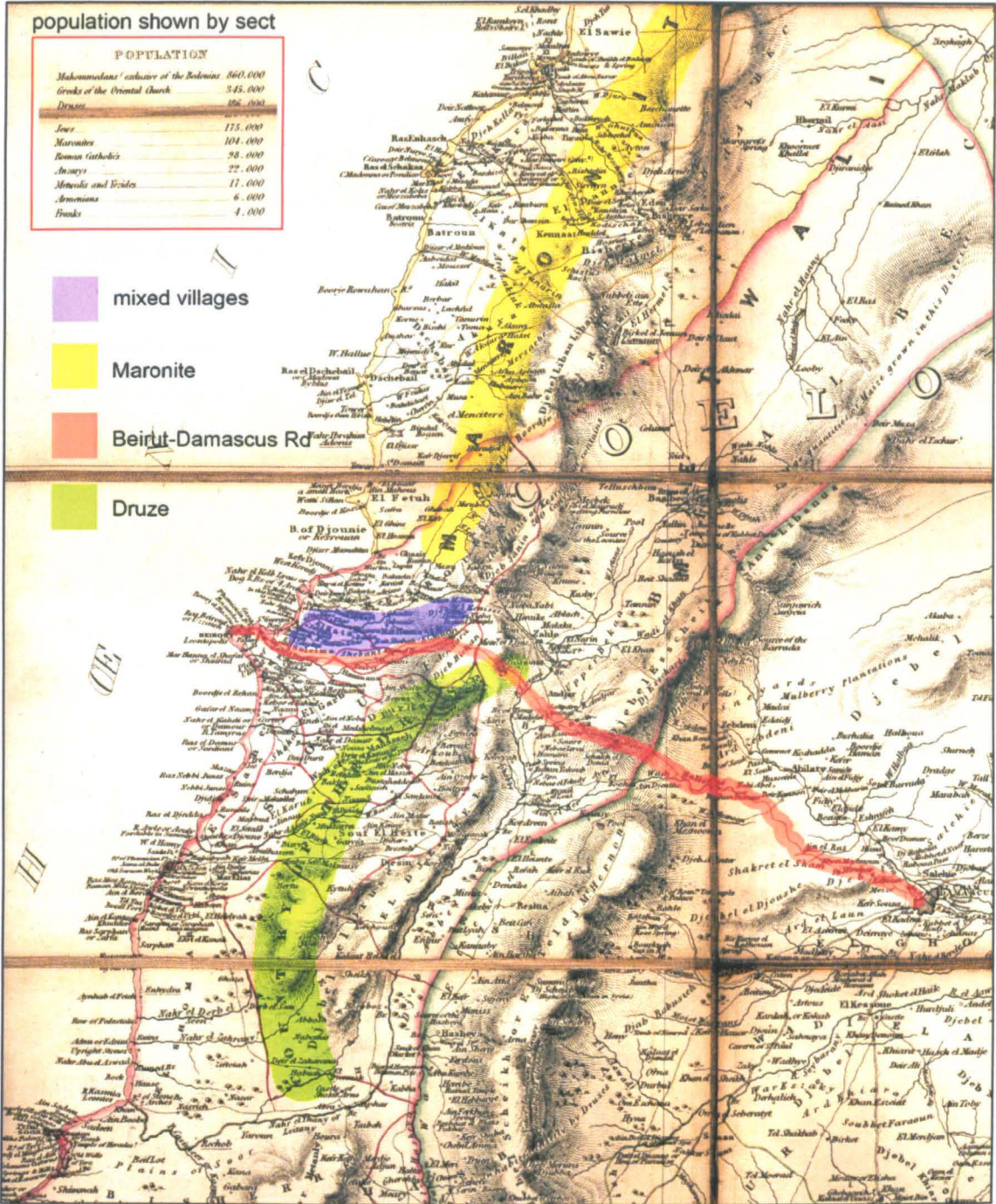


Figure 2. Map of the Levant at the time of the double lieutenancy. The Druze and Maronite lieutenancies are indicated, separated by the Beirut-Damascus Road acting as the border, as well as the area of the mixed villages of the Metn mountains, which the Maronite villagers from the neighbouring Kisrawan mountains attempted to 'purify' from the Druze in 1860, which triggered the abolition of the double lieutenancy system as it reified sectarian spaces. This is a commercial map (indicated are the cultivations of various areas, such as maize, mulberry and so on), but it contains a table with a population count by confession (box highlighted in red), and the main Christian sects (Yazedis, Metwalis) are also indicated in other parts of the map. This shows how trading activities and economic affiliations took into account the sects and the areas in which they were present (Wyld 1840).

In the mounting tension, sect and territory were used to shape legitimacy until the Maronite commoners – often inspired by the clergy – rose against the authority of the ruling family in the Maronite Kaymakam (Makdisi 2000). Here, pacific gatherings turned into radicalised and armed confrontation until a revolt broke out asking the feudal lords for equality; the events led to aggression, looting of property and theft of weapons. These events subverted the traditional relationships based on the loyalty of the commoners to the lords. Moreover, the social revolt started to be framed in sectarian terms as it extended to the southern districts of the Maronite Kaymakam, where both the Druze and the Maronite in the two lieutenancies had kept their weapons since the previous clashes in 1840. The strife in the mixed villages of the Maronite lieutenancy brought the loss of thousands of lives; for the first time, the commoners entered the realm of politics fighting against their notables, and in so doing, they used the Maronite sect as a discourse of identity. This violence was perpetrated not only against the subjects of a different sect but also against their built environment. Makdisi (2000)⁴¹ reports a number of incidents between 1858 and 1860 involving the built fabric of villages in the mountains, including cutting down trees, looting, destroying harvests and houses. But the even more tragic acts of destruction took place when the revolt of the Maronite mobilized to purify the mixed villages of the two lieutenancies, claiming political rights as the representatives of a modern Christian nation. The first target of the revolt was the house of the Christian lieutenant which a group of Christian rebels was planning to burn down as a declaration of war to the Druze and to the local elites. Other examples of destruction within the planned purification of the mixed lands included the razing of the farms belonging to the Druze notables in the village of Niha by the Maronite commoners and the reciprocal burning of sacred sites and monasteries of the Druzes and the Maronites, as well as the sack of Zahle and Dayr el Qamar by the Druze. This view of a national territory based on religion did not make sense in the pre-Tanzimāt era, but it now challenged the new territorial ‘balance’ overcoming the traditional social privileges:

they imagined a Christian geography that bound villagers to Kisrawan to those of the Matn and the Shouf; in so doing they defied the traditional demarcations of the notable families that had hitherto defined Lebanese geography, and they ignored

41 In particular, see pages 99-100 and Chapter 7.

the new geography of the European-Ottoman partition that delegated authority to kaymakams chosen from among the elites. (Makdisi 2000: 120)

In these new geographies of sectarian differentiation “security was guaranteed by the absence of rival communities” (Makdisi 2000: 134) and translated into deportations, waves of refugees, and the demarcation of areas considered as ‘safe havens’. The destruction of the built environment in Mount Lebanon can be regarded as an active component of those geographies.

3.3.2 Unifying the sect: the Mutasarrifiyya or “smaller Lebanon” (1860-1920)

After an international tribunal was created to investigate the massacres during the revolts, a new political unit, the *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon, called by the French authorities “Smaller Lebanon” (*Petit Liban*) — was instituted upon decision of Britain, France, Prussia, Russia and the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Ottoman authorities. The status of Mutasarrifiyya was not unique to Mount Lebanon in the Ottoman Levant⁴²; the difference with the other regular provinces (*Sanjak*) was that they were administered directly by The Sultan of Istanbul, who – in the case of Mount Lebanon – nominated a non-Lebanese Christian to the role of governor (*Mutasarrif*) of this province. The Mutasarrifiyya reunited the previous two lieutenancies but spread down to the coastal cities close to Beirut (Figure 3).

⁴² The special districts of Beirut, Jerusalem, and Samsun were also Mustasarrifiyyas; Samos – also with special status – was a *Beylik* (Karpas 1985).

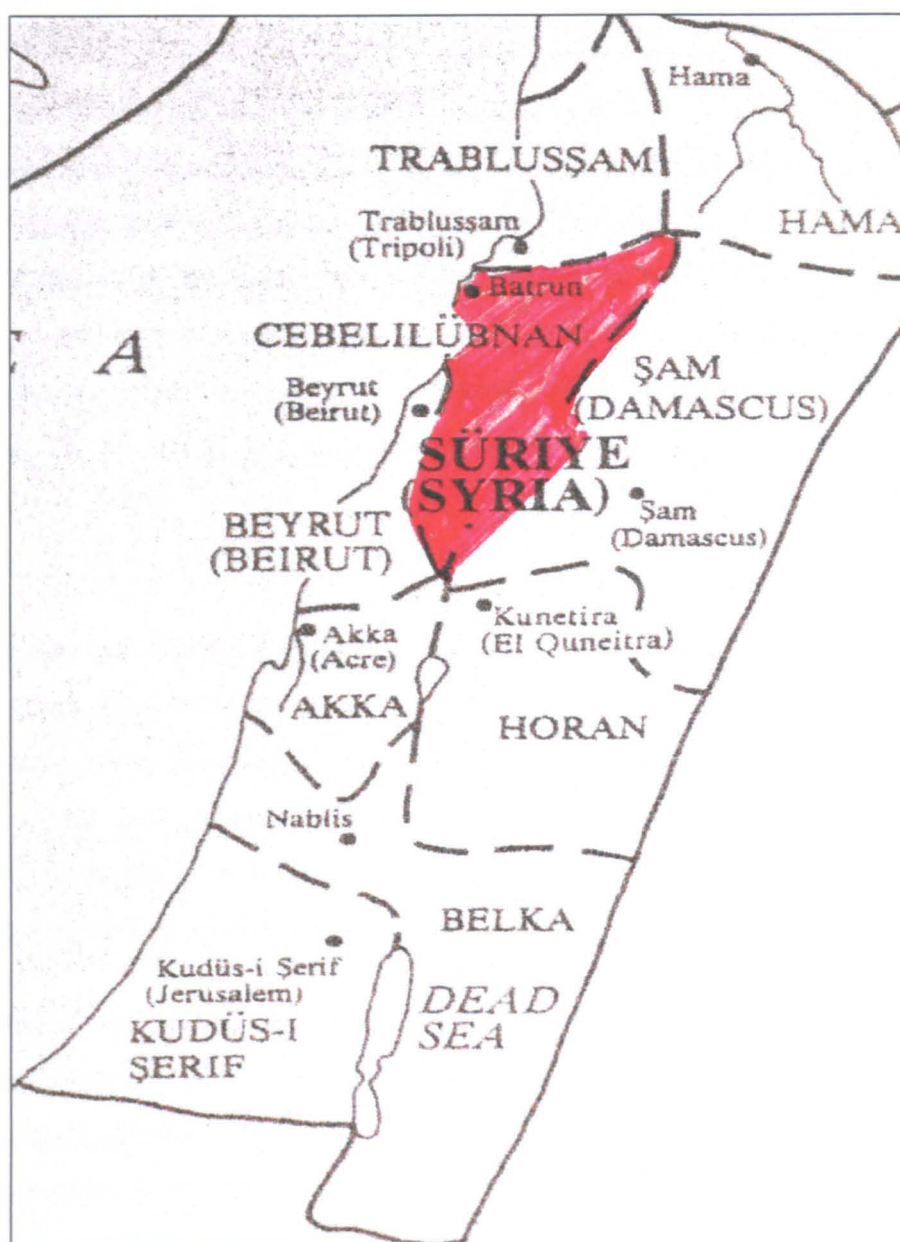


Figure 3. The Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon (Cebelilübnan, in red) in the context of the surrounding provinces of the East Mediterranean. Map modified by the author. Source: Karpas (1985: xiv).

In 1861, the Ottoman authorities issued an administrative document for the Mutasarrifiyya called *Réglement Organique*⁴³. On the basis of this regulation, the Ottoman police was now the only institution entitled to use violence in order to guarantee the security of all the citizens, regardless of their previous notable affiliations. Boundaries were demarcated and six administrative provinces were created⁴⁴, where taxation was regularized throughout. Governance during the Mutasarrifiyya consisted of embedding the religious sects within every aspect of the political process and of entangling them in a less visible but pervasive interplay of security, territoriality and demography. Sectarian belonging in the Mutasarrifiyya played a subtle, pervasive role: it determined the electoral representation in the six provinces and the access of the individuals to public functions. The indigenous genealogical geographies had been overthrown by the centralised government of the Mutasarrifiyya.

Another major political and spatial change took place at the end of the nineteenth century, which aligned the sectarian discourse along new political configurations. Due to the decline of silk production and trade which, until the 1850s, flourished in Mount Lebanon, a vast wave of mainly Maronite migration towards the coastal cities of the Mutasarrifiyya began. This migration, as we will see later, had heavy consequences on the political as well as urban situation in post-independence Beirut.

The regime of the Mutasarrifiyya ended after the First World War. During the San Remo Conference of 1920, the winning Allied Powers re-settled the political boundaries of the Middle East after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers. The French authorities proclaimed the Republic of Greater Lebanon (*Grand Liban*) under its colonial mandate (Figure 4) on the basis of what – in 1916 – had been established in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement between the French and British governments for the partition of the Middle East⁴⁵. The new state consisted of an enlargement of the boundaries of the Mutasarrifiyya which included part of the lands once belonging to the

43 *Réglement fondamental relatif à l'administration du Mont-Liban* en date du 30 zilkadeh 1227 H; 9 Juin 1861. In Tarazi Fawaz (1994: 216).

44 These provinces were: Kura, Kisrawan, Zahle, Matn, south of Beirut-Damascus Road, Jazzine/Iqlim at-Tuffah.

45 This was a secret agreement reached on 15 and 16 May 1916 between French and British diplomats Francois Picot and Mark Sykes about the delineation of the territories of direct or indirect influence of the two European states on the Eastern Mediterranean and its hinterland. The outcome was a map of a partitioned Middle East with an overview of the French and British interests – from customs fees to schools and hospitals, to railways, to government – within the bigger picture of the formation of an Arab state or a confederation of Arab states whose borders were to be traced on the matrix of these areas of influence.

former Ottoman provinces of Beirut and Damascus, where also the support of the Shiite population for the new French vision of a Greater Lebanon was co-opted by the mandate authorities on the basis of their sectarian identity (Firro 2006). In the same way in which the Maronite and the Druze were divided earlier in the mountains, the French tried to break the relations between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the southern provinces of the new state and to gain the support of the Shiite, against the Sunni mainly pan-Arab political preferences. This caused a deep divergence of territorial visions around the same political reality among the Shiite masses, notables, and clergy, many of whom continued supporting a vision of Lebanon as part of a greater Arab nation (Firro 2006).

3.3.3 Normalizing the sect: the French mandate or “greater Lebanon” (1920-1943)

The governmental technologies of the French mandate in Greater Lebanon since 1920 reflected a discourse about the historical backwardness of the colonized space (Agnew 1998), a theme reflected also by the League of Nations when – following the San Remo peace conference – Lebanon was declared a mandate. The mandate authorities collected information related to the life of the local population to be measured through statistics. This knowledge would then constitute the basis for governing the welfare of the population:

it was the first duty of the Commission to look after the welfare of the natives. The best index of the extent to which the welfare of the natives was safeguarded would be found in the mortality and morbidity statistics...It was the duty of the Commission to protect the native and, if the native races were dying out, it was clear that their moral and material welfare was being sacrificed (League Of Nations 1945).

In 1926, a republican constitution strongly inspired by the French and Belgian examples was adopted. The Greater Lebanon's parliament was based on a sectarian division of seats, although in the administrative districts the election would not follow a sectarian pattern: a candidate must obtain the majority of the votes in his or her district, regardless of the sect which the electors belong to. Nevertheless, this practice has brought gerrymandering in order to favour the election of candidates belonging to specific sects by creating districts as homogeneous as possible under from a religious point of view (Corm 2005).

After its suspension under the Vichy regime⁴⁶ during the Second World War, the constitution was re-instated following popular uprising. Independence was finally proclaimed by the commander in chief of the Free French forces in the Middle East, General George Catroux on 22 November 1943, after a fortnight of street protests and the imprisonment of then Lebanese President of the Republic Bishara al Khoury and Prime Minister Riad al -Solh.

Since 1926, the mandate authorities and the independent Lebanese government engaged in a process which gradually regulated the legal life of the sects, granting that issues of personal and family law, as well as education, could be dealt with by religious tribunals, as we will see in the next section. One step in this process was particularly significant: in 1936 France crystallized the role of the religious communities as the main pattern for political organization through two decrees (*arrêtés*) issued by the French high commissioner; the documents stated the existence of seventeen “historical [sectarian] communities” (*communautés historiques*) in Lebanon⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ The Vichy regime was the name of the Nazi collaborative government in France during the Second World War.

⁴⁷ Decree N°60 L.R. in 1936 and N°146 L.R. in 1938.

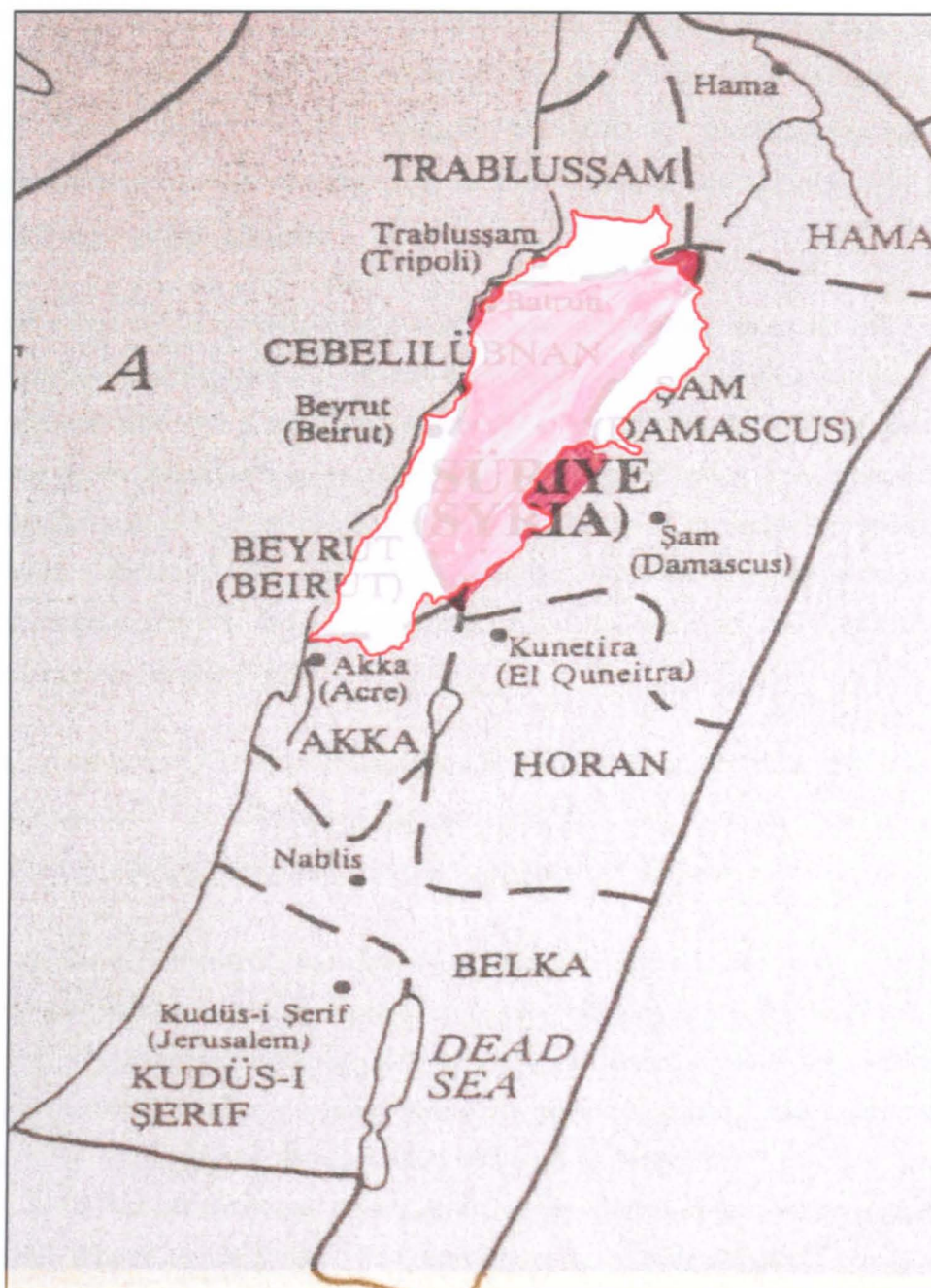


Figure 4. Approximate location of modern Lebanon borders with respects to the Mutasarrifiyya. Map modified by the author by superimposing maps with different scale and detail, based on triangulation between Damascus, Beirut and Homs. Source: Karpát (1985: xiv).

In the same way, the mandate government used the imaginative geographies of a “fluctuating” population and of disorder in this part of the Mediterranean Levant to shape a rational space for modern Lebanon that served to represent a national territory through the enumeration, visualization, and exhibition of its features, among which were the religious communities:

the extent of the territories, the primitive state of the native tribes, illiteracy, the fact that in some cases the population fluctuates (since it comprises nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes), and migratory movements are all obstacles which render the task of the Administration in this respect peculiarly difficult. [...] in most of the territories in question, all attempts to count the population, to establish a register of births, marriages, and deaths, to register the inhabitants or prepare accurate population statistics, or even approximate estimates, encounter many difficulties. (League of Nations 1945)

Parallel to the colonial project of cartographing the land and people of Mount Lebanon, and subsequently of Greater Lebanon, religious sectarianism was increasingly normalised as a determining factor in the biopolitics⁴⁸ of the indigenous population:

In the case of the territories of the Near East, information is also given regarding the composition of the population from the point of view of religion (and race), in view of the important part played by the religious communities in the social and political life of these countries, where the personal status of every inhabitant depends on the law of the community to which he belongs. [...] the most recent data furnished in the annual reports regarding the numbers of persons belonging to these various communities ... The result shows a veritable mosaic of creeds and races. (League of Nations 1945)

Through the idea of *communauté historique* religion became the source of law and of state political legitimacy. In the same period as the Maronite exodus from the mountain due to the decline of the silk commerce until later in the 1920s, waves of Christian

48 Michel Foucault describes the “biopolitics of the human race” that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century (2003: 243) as a technology of power (or bio-power) that involves “a set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on” (243) as well as “control over the relations between the human race [...] and their environment, the milieu in which they live (245).

refugees from Damascus, as well as Armenians from Turkey and the other Ottoman Asian and European provinces, and Greeks from Anatolia, fled to the Lebanese coast and especially to Beirut in order to escape the ethnic and religious massacres taking place in the other areas of the Ottoman Empire. These factors, together with the question of the Palestinian refugees from the newly declared state of Israel in 1948, and with the rise of Nasser's Pan-Arab political program since the 1950s, and the consequent radicalisation of socialist governments in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lybia, were to further modify the urban landscape and political culture of the new focal centre of the country, the capital city of Beirut, which became the destination for major waves of immigration.

Different territorial understandings of the Lebanese state, inspired by different nationalist ideas that had emerged during the mandate (Firro 2003), developed and occasionally clashed in post-independence Lebanon and especially in Beirut. Although not always clear-cut, the main divide lay between a political and cultural imaginary that saw Greater Lebanon as belonging to the Arab world and one that instead viewed Lebanon as a land with a territorial and cultural specificity given by its multicultural – and highly Christian – population, and whose borders should be maintained where France traced them in 1920. The first imaginary was mainly (but not totally) supported by the Muslim (and particularly Sunni) population, while the Christians – especially the new Maronite bourgeoisie who had emigrated from the Mountain and flourished in Beirut during the mandate – were advocates of the Lebanist thesis, which looked with favourable eyes to the West and especially to France (Firro 2003).

In this dispute about state boundaries and national ideas, the Maronites were the ones whose sense of community overlapped and coincided with their sense of state (el Khazen 2000), as they conceived Greater Lebanon as the result of their struggles since the 1860s and the institution of the Mutasarrifiyya following the Maronite insurgency in Mount Lebanon (Corm 2005). As a result of this divergence, sectarian tension mounted periodically in the Lebanese capital and “from the 1930s, the streets of Beirut, every now and then, became the scene of violent clashes between Christian and Muslim gangs, one side brandishing the banner of Lebanism, the other of Arabism” (Salibi 1988: 180).

3.3.4 Negotiating the sect: the Republic of Lebanon (1943-1975)

Just before independence in 1946, the different nationalist visions went through a wave of polarization. This was a phase in which different nationalistic voices spoke in the name of a 'rational' dialogue about national belonging, although their interpretation of the idea of nation was highly disputed (Salibi 1988). For example, the National Bloc, a Christian political grouping headed by Egyptian-born Raymond Eddé, demanded that a special relationship with France be maintained after the end of the mandate, for fear that – if not properly handled – independence might imply a risk for territorial integrity. The more religiously heterogeneous Constitutional Bloc instead was enthusiast for full-scale independence. The Constitutional Bloc, gathering mainly urban Christians, Shiite and Druze, awaited independence with anticipation because of the economic dynamism it could bring. Other groups demanded that “Lebanon be made a national home for the Christians under French protection, just as Palestine was to be made a national home for the Jews” (Salibi 1988: 184) and proposed to integrate the Muslims into Syrian territory. Pan-Arab nationalists – spread mainly among the Sunni – also awaited independence impatiently for this reason. Finally, a pragmatic compromise was sought between Christians and Muslims in order to rule the new country, postponing questions of sectarian power.

In the discursive battle for the definition of the nation state of Lebanon, the spaces of colonialism overlapped with the territorial visions of the post-independence political parties on each religious side. The idea of refuge, for example, was largely a production of the imperial imaginative geographies about Lebanon from the early nineteenth century; however, it was also used by Christian leaders since the 1920s, who sought to promote their nationalist thesis about Lebanon as a land with the specificity of having been a refuge for the Eastern Christians and, therefore, deserving to remain so. The negation of that same refuge – or of the Christians' need for one – came instead from the Sunni side, which dismissed also the Christian territorial vision.

Between the 1920s and independence the political debate was dominated by Sunni and Maronite notables (Salibi 1988; el Khazen 2000). The 'Arabism versus Lebanism' pattern constitutes, according to el Khazen (2000), one of the most important keys to interpret political life during the mandate and just after independence. These two different visions of the same political and territorial reality were integrated in an unwritten agreement in 1943 when the National Pact (*al mithāq al watani*) was agreed

between Maronite president Bishara al-Khoury and Sunni PM Ryad as-Solh. Through the pact, the Maronite and the Sunni community reached a compromise on power sharing: the Maronite renounced French protection as a legacy of its colonial mandate, and recognized the Arab cultural roots of Lebanon. The Sunni, on their part, renounced their claims to integrate Lebanon territorially in the Syrian hinterland and accepted instead the borders traced by France in 1920 when the colonial mandate was instituted, as we will later see. This compromise institutionalized the notion of coexistence and balance of communal power in the Lebanese public life, and also affirmed the sectarian nature of the political process. The consecration of the notion of coexistence, like the idea of haven and refuge during the clashes in Mount Lebanon less than one century earlier, found its meaning within a spatial reasoning and a territorial vision of power which conceived sectarianism as a given. According to the pact, the division of the highest state powers had to be conceded to the Maronite (presidency of the Republic), to the Sunni Muslims (presidency of the council of ministers) and to the Shiite (presidency of the parliamentary chambers). This division reflected a population census held in 1932 (the last official census taken in the country) which resulted in a Maronite demographic majority, followed by Sunni and Shiite. This pact is still considered to be the seal on Lebanon's existence as a modern state where religious communities – although irreducibly different among themselves – can coexist in peace. The double imaginary of tolerance and rivalry was thus reaffirmed. Although many consider the pact as a shaky compromise based on a double negation of Maronite and Sunni claims (el Khazen 2000) which brought no constructive policy for the country, it is also important to remark on a fundamental aspect of the pact for Lebanon's representation as a modern nation-state: the pact created a political coincidence between sectarianism and Lebanon's modernity as an independent nation state. Through this unwritten agreement, we can interpret sectarianism in its socially produced and discursive nature, as well as start considering critically all the assumptions about the 'un-modern' character of sectarian conflict.

Two crises marked the political scene after the National Pact; the first was a brief and non-violent moment of sectarian tension in 1952, followed by the resignation of President Bishara al Khoury and his replacement by National Liberal Party's leader Michel Chamoun. The second one, longer and more bellicose, called the "small civil war", saw violent sectarian skirmishes taking place in Beirut in 1958 and brought the National Pact to a critical trial. Sunni and Maronite clashed – especially in Beirut – on the basis of their visions of Lebanon, respectively Arabism and Lebanism. The

territorial considerations became even more significant in 1958, when the United Arab Republic⁴⁹ of Syria and Egypt was proclaimed: the tension between the two ideas of Lebanon became prominent as Arabism started acquiring a concrete territorial layout, which, therefore, worsened the already existing Christian fear of Sunni Arabism (Salibi 1988). The crisis of 1958 was also contemporary to the fall of the Iraqi monarchy provoked by a state coup by the Ba'ath party and to the fusion of Syria, Egypt and Yemen in the United Arab Republic and to the adoption of the Eisenhower doctrine⁵⁰ by President Camille Chamoun. This war has been described by some as an internal affair – the clash of two different interpretations of Lebanese history (Salibi 1958) – and, by others, as the culmination of external geopolitical factors within the Cold War geopolitical code (el Khazen 2000; Corm 2005). However, these versions tend once again to idealise and de-humanize violence and – more specifically – to consider the territorial implications of the crisis as a mere backdrop for the unfolding of political and historical facts without taking into account the spaces that were produced by the discourses of Lebanism and Arabism.

After the 1958 clashes, followed by the U.S. marines' stationing on the coast of Beirut, Christian army general Fouad Shehab was elected President of the Republic until 1964. The so-called Shehabist era implied the attempt to affirm a stronger state in a "convivial republic" with a "porous state" (el Khazen 2000: 118). Shehab's public policy was one of capillary territorial management: it aimed at creating a higher sense of national belonging by homogenizing the development and the distribution of wealth throughout all the Lebanese territory and not only in Beirut. The city, as a matter of fact, attracted most of the administrative, economic and cultural life in the country, while leaving a developmental gap with respect to the rest of the country, especially with the south. This phenomenon – also called "*Macrocéphalie Beyrouthine*" (Bourgey 1985: 11) – indicated the demographic and functional concentration in Beirut compared with the rest of the Lebanese territory and the consequent lack of sense of national belonging in the peripheral regions – according to the Shehabist approach. Fouad Shehab's attempts to instate a sense of national unity through regional development and planning included national education and welfare, the creation of the Central Bank, Council for Public

⁴⁹ Between 1958 and 1961, Syria and Egypt joined their territories in the United Arab Republic.

⁵⁰ Former US President Eisenhower's foreign policy has been defined the Eisenhower doctrine after his speech of 5 January 1957, in which he declared that the US would respond militarily to every direct menace to its territory by communism, and would intervene to help countries who request the help of the US against that threat. The first application of the Eisenhower doctrine was in Lebanon in 1958 when the US Marines landed on its shores to curb the civil unrest in Beirut.

Functions, Ministry of Planning, Central Direction of Statistics and Executive Board of Public Works. The electoral law, nevertheless, was not modified and the public functions remained in the hands of the sects. Also the Shehab government, like the Khoury government in 1952, remained entangled in inter-sectarian disputes when Shehab was accused, especially by his fellow Christians, of pursuing a socialist policy or even of a plan to leave the country in the hands of the Muslims (Corm 2005).

With Charles Helou's conservative government from 1964 to 1970, the physical appearance, economic and cultural image of Beirut changed faster and faster: real estate speculation took up a vertiginous pace, transforming Beirut's red-tiled roof skyline into a sprawl of modernist towers in the centre while slums – the so called “misery belts” – spread in the periphery (Khalaf 1993, Boudjikianian 1994). In the city centre, especially after the 1973 oil crisis, the flexible flows of international capital transformed Beirut's political economy and its space. One striking example is the development of Beirut's hotel district, where several European and American corporations invested in the tourism economy. A high number of tower hotel developments in the western part of the city centre transformed the surrounding areas of Hamra and Ras Beirut from small, middle-income neighbourhoods into lively cosmopolitan districts with an international public who inhabited multi-storey residential developments. Lebanon favoured an open economy and easy movement of people and capital through its porous borders, differently from the majority of the other Arab countries which were under socialist regimes. State intervention in the national economy was limited, and the most productive sectors were those of the service economy, especially tourism and financial services, particularly after the government allowed investors to open concealed anonymous bank accounts in Lebanese banks. In these years, “Beirut came to radiate prosperity to such an extent that hardly any part of the country was left entirely untouched by its influence” (Salibi 1988: 191).

The “playground”-like (Khalaf 2001) open character of Lebanon and its focal point Beirut was not only mirrored in the economic dynamism and in the vibrant political and cultural scene of the city which constituted a unique platform of experimentation and avant-garde in the Middle East, but was also reflected in the culture of political mobilisation and radicalisation of these years. The histories and territories of the colonial past intertwined with Lebanon's postcolonial time and space, producing new geographs that were intertwined with past webs of power. The political and cultural

scene of 1960s Beirut was associated – once again – with the colonial image of the refuge. It was conceived as a city offering shelter to the victims of political discontent, or even persecution, for example to the emigrants from the socialist regimes of Syria and Egypt, or – the emblematic case – for the Palestinian refugees, but also to anyone who wanted to enjoy free speech in the Arab world. While Arabism and Nasserism were conveying the Muslim political engagement, on the Christian side the representation of Lebanon as a “showcase” of the Arab world and of the Lebanese as the mediators between Arabs and Europeans became the main leitmotif of the Maronite bourgeoisie (Corm 2005). The encounter between East and West, Lebanon as an example of coexistence of different people and of a sustainable sectarian balance – all ideas owing to modern colonial imaginary – constituted the statements that formed the Maronites’ conception of Lebanon, and especially of the Kata’ib.

According to local surveys, however, despite a high political radicalisation, the Lebanese socio-political scene towards the end of the 1960s was at its lowest sectarian tones since independence (Khazen 2000) and political radicalisation took place on a socio-economic basis (such as class struggle and 1968-inspired mass politics) or through youth movements whose stand was critical both of their own religious institutions and of the state and – in particular – their stand was in the favour of the Palestinian cause in Lebanon among both Christian and Muslim associations (Khazen 2000). Although on political rather than sectarian lines, the Lebanese population and political circles started to split at the end of the 1960s, especially after the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict and the defeat of the Arab armies, followed by the signature of the Cairo Agreement between the government of Charles Helou and Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Secretly signed in Cairo in the presence of Egyptian president Jamal Abd el Nasser, the agreement was created between the chief of the Lebanese army, General Emile Bustani, and PLO’s chief Yasser Arafat, as a response to the periodic clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian resistance organizations in Lebanon in the 1960s. The agreement, initially kept “confidential”, was ratified by the Lebanese Parliament later in the same year, and it ruled the passage of security and authority in the Palestinian refugee camps from the Lebanese army’s intelligence service (*Deuxième Bureau*) to the PLO, although they remained under Lebanese territorial sovereignty. It also instituted a regime of tolerance towards the Palestinian resistance’s militant activities in the southern and eastern areas of Lebanon (Corm 2005). One further major dynamic was constituted by the expulsion of the PLO

from Jordan⁵¹ and the consequent installation of its headquarters in Beirut. These evolutions provoked remarkable internal tension: the Palestinian guerrillas often clashed with the Lebanese security forces, and the political panorama was more and more divided regarding the stand that the army should take to cope with the militants, as well as on the nature of the Palestinian armed presence within Lebanese territory, especially after the revelation of the Cairo agreement.

Among the different types of reactions of the Lebanese parties to the radicalisation of the Palestinian guerrillas, the position of the Kata'ib party is of interest to this study because a clash that took place between the party members and a Palestinian commando was to spark the war in 1975. After shifting position with regard to the Arab cause, the party's stand at the beginning of the 1970s was at its highest alignment with Pan-Arab ideals (el Khazen 2000). Nevertheless, the main discourse among party leaders and supporters framed the PLO presence in terms of territorial aggression (el Khazen 2000)⁵², including the encirclement of the Christian neighbourhoods of Beirut (Sarkis 1993). This urban geopolitical script was a popular rumour (the PLO never directly and specifically encircled or attacked any Christian neighbourhood) also among the inhabitants and on which the Kataib militias knew how to capitalise later during the war. As a former Kataib fighter told me:

They [the Palestinians] had built their camps all around Beirut and more precisely around East Beirut. So if you study the geography [of the episode], you will see that there was a camp in Dbayeh, one in Tell Zatar, one in Burj Hammoud, Karantina, Lailaki. (Interview with Kata'ib former fighter, Beirut, 22 November 2005)

⁵¹ Numerous Palestinian guerrillas relocated from Jordan to Lebanon following the actions by "Black September" group in Amman in 1972.

⁵² El Khazen's analysis of the Kata'ib's position towards the PLO – however accurate – again exposes the modern certainty of the existence of the sect as something innate and present outside the social process. He defines the Maronite territoriality and political identity – which as we saw are a contingent product of modern colonial governance – as different from the other communities for "its close political identification with the state. Of all communities, the overlap between Maronite *raison de commounaute* and *raison d'état* was comparatively the most visible and the most spontaneous" (el Khazen 2000: 83, emphasis in the text). El Khazen has an Orientalist and cartographic vision of the sectarian community, as he describes it as something ancestral rather than as the fruit of the technologies of the colonizing power and their impact on personhood and political identity in the Lebanese society. This view is then conveyed into the representation of the contemporary role of the Maronite towards the PLO as the "Maronite communal sensitivities shaped by centuries of rebellion in Lebanon's mountains and valleys", according to the historian, were attacked by a PLO alleged "insensitivity" to the sectarian factor (ibid.).

The same fighter indicated that the inaction of the Lebanese army towards the Palestinian guerrillas constituted a risk of loss of the “*foyer*” (home, refuge) in favour of the Palestinians. The hostility of the Maronite against the PLO took the form of territorial protection of what the Maronites defined as a century-long history of self-determination:

to the extent that the Maronites viewed Lebanon as their last refuge after centuries of persecution and insecurity, they were not willing to ‘share’ that refuge with a people also looking for a refuge in the age of the nation-state. No two-‘refugee’ people can share a refuge. It is either ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’. (al Khazen 2000: 83)

Despite the evidence of little sectarian colour to the perception of social practices at the eve of the war, the overlapping between colonial sectarian cartographies and post-independence nationalistic visions contributed to produce new representations of the city and the state that – later during the war – became the discourses on whose basis Beirut was fragmented along sectarian lines.

3.4 Conclusion

Lebanese sectarianism is often conceived as an un-modern phenomenon that originates from an undefined traditionalism or fanaticism. Within this vision, Lebanon has been often considered an “unachieved state” (Salam 2001: 9). However, critical studies of sectarianism have put those assumptions into question by showing how the emergence of Lebanon as a modern nation-state in 1920 is linked to the constitution and mobilization of sectarian discourses in the interests of a specific political process. Sectarianism, therefore, is a phenomenon that is socially constructed through specific practices, rather than a given fact on the ground.

Since the nineteenth century, the sect constituted a central idea in the narratives about modernization and progress towards civility of Mount Lebanon and its coastal cities. The idea of ‘sect’ emerged in late Ottoman and mandate Lebanon as a modern discourse about identity and politics. Since the 1830s, the area that constitutes present day Lebanon has undergone an epistemological conquest in which the sect has become the only certain representation of the Lebanese cultural and political reality. The discursive affirmation of the sect in Lebanon is not only embedded in politics, but also in space

that politics produce, from the electoral district, to the historical maps of Lebanon, to demographic devices as population census. This exclusive and unquestioned role of the religious sect in the production of territoriality in Lebanon prevents the political process from freeing itself from the political violence that always lurks between the idea of Lebanon as a 'model' of coexistence and its only apparent opposite, Lebanon as a container of self-defined religious communities, or "minorities", that clash against each other. The point is not about affirming one or the other of the two narratives, it is about questioning the existence of entities called sects in Lebanon by enquiring into the social practices that – in less than a century – made the sect the only key to rationalise Lebanese politics.

Shaping space has also been an active part of Lebanon's modernization discourse, and sectarianism has been a decisive component of this discourse. Geographical knowledge played a central role in this process, as it actively produced the national idea of Lebanon between the mid-nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century through the idea of territorial separation of the sects.

In the Kaymakam regime, Druze and Maronite were separated territorially; successively, with the creation of the Mutasarrifiyya, the sects were not separated cartographically but were embedded in the formal political process. Until the proclamation of Greater Lebanon, the Lebanese communities have been considered as separate entities, distinct containers of culture, politics and demography. Considering these aspects, we could reframe sectarianism as the condition for the birth of a Lebanese modern nation-state, rather than as the sign of its failure, or we could say – as Makdisi put it – that "Sectarianism as an idea draws its meaning only within a nationalist paradigm and hence [...] it belongs to our modern world" (2000: 13).

During Lebanon's colonial past, the sects were narrated by poets, described by travellers, categorized by government officials and finally counted by the mandate authorities. Modern cartography first located the sects in separate territorial entities and then made them part of the electoral process of the new nation state, all the way from the electoral district to the parliament seat. These colonial territorialities overlapped with the militias' political geographies producing the sectarian enclaves that came to constitute the space of wartime Beirut. Only if we consider the cartographic reasoning through which Lebanon was made into an intelligible map of sects, is it possible to

regard some of the militia practices during the civil war – such as ID killings, population transfers, sniper killings, the erection of barricades and the institution of enclaves – less as the sign of the disappearance of a modern state, and more as a series of modern devices whose histories and territories owe much to Lebanon's colonial past. In the next chapters, I will show how architectures of enmity constituted during colonialism joined sect to politics and translated it into territory. These architectures returned during the civil war. Beirut's militias, far from being 'irresponsible actors' driven by 'irrational' violence – as classic international relations often depicted them – acted through concrete practices whose statements reflected the sectarian categories along which the colonial powers made sense of the space and of the population of the nation-state of Lebanon.

The intertwined histories of the colonial and postcolonial violence also materialised in the changes that affected the built fabric of Beirut during the war. Well before the beginning of the war, these changes already reflected the accelerating political tension. I now wish to emphasise the relationships between a number of socio-political events which preceded the beginning of the Lebanese civil war and the concrete spaces of violent escalation that they produced.

Chapter 4. The Urban Geopolitics Of The Escalation Towards The Civil War

A city is every site that is capable of producing a material and public (hence shared) image of the form and functioning of the world or a part of it.
(Farinelli 2003: 153)⁵³

4.1 Introduction

The period between 13 April 1975 and the end of November 1976 is commonly known with the Arabic expression *harb al sanatayn* (the Two Years' War) which indicates the approximate duration of this period. About twenty lightly armed and not yet systematically organized militia groups – several of them with sponsors in foreign countries – engaged in urban guerrilla fighting over portions of Beirut (Chamussy 1978; Davie 1983; El Khazen 2000⁵⁴). During the Two Years' War, the monopoly of the Lebanese state on political violence declined and eventually disappeared with the fragmentation of the Lebanese security forces on a sectarian basis in late 1975.

Drawing a conclusive outline of the socio-political situation at the eve of the war falls out of the scope of this work, as this subject has been widely treated by numerous historians and political scientists (such as El Khazen 2000; Corm 2005). However, it is important to mention a number of aspects of the Lebanese political power sharing system and socioeconomic performance in order to better understand some of the geographical specifications of the urban violence which broke out in a number of locations of Beirut in 1975. What I want to underline is how the socio-political situation at the eve of the civil war did not develop in a spatial and material void. On the contrary, the ways these processes took place was also influenced by the material urban infrastructure of cities such as Beirut and Sidon; in return, the evolving territoriality of the conflict reflected on the material fabric.

⁵³ Translation by the author.

⁵⁴ Farid el Khazen (2000: 303-304) provides data on the militias' composition, size and numbers of weapons from the Lebanese army intelligence sources.

4.2 The Escalation To The War

Prior to the war, the Lebanese political panorama was characterized by a situation of compromise between Maronite Christian and Sunni Muslim political elites. This compromise had been formally sanctioned in the National Pact in 1943, as we have seen previously. One of the main effects of the National Pact had been that of dividing the highest state powers between the members of the Maronite Christians (President of the Republic), the Sunni Muslims (Prime Minister) and the Shiite Muslims (Chambers Speaker). The scene was also marked by the rising influence of Druze leader Kamal Joumblatt in the socialist leftist members across numerous communities and by the empowerment of the communist left since the 1960s. Finally, the Shiite community in these years gathered around the charismatic Iranian born Imam Musa Sadr, the founder of the party *Amal*, who later disappeared in unclear circumstances⁵⁵.

According to some historians, there was no condition for a civil war to break out at this moment of the Lebanese republican history: statistically, multi-faith social practices were on the rise and there was no poignant internal issue provoking deep instability (El Khazen 2000). However, it is significant to point out the changing role of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon – especially after the creation of the Cairo Agreement in 1969 and the transfer of PLO headquarters from Amman to Beirut in 1972 – towards more active and radical forms of anti-Israeli guerrilla operations. The disclosure of the agreement had provoked different reactions in the Lebanese parties: while the Palestinian cause obtained the favour of much of the left, the *Hizb al-Kata'ib* (Phalange Party)⁵⁶ and other right-wing parties such as the *Hizb al Wataniyyin al Ahrār* (National Liberal Party) were increasingly aligning in anti-PLO positions despite the fact that a number of right-wing youth movements across the 1960s viewed the Palestinian refugees' issue (El Khazen 2000) with favour. Since 1973 the position of the army towards the Palestinian guerrilla had been also controversial: the Cairo Agreement had granted liberty to the Palestinian guerrillas to carry out resistance operations against Israel from the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, in which the PLO and its militias now

⁵⁵ There are various hypotheses about Imam Moussa Sadr's disappearance, including his kidnapping by Libyan secret services. For more details, see Theroux (1987).

⁵⁶ This party was founded in 1936 by Pierre Gemayel, who later passed on the leadership to his sons Amine and Bashir. It was inspired by Spanish dictator's Franco's brigades and by the Italian Fascist squads and adopted right-wing ideologies. During the war it became one of the most copious militias that converged in the coalition of the Lebanese Forces (*al Quwwāt al Lubnāniyya*).

had a high degree of territorial and logistic autonomy. Although this liberty was formally limited to the perimeter of the camps, the guerrillas had started to assert their presence inside the cities as well by instituting mobile roadblocks and performing displays of weapons. After some occasional clashes with the Palestinian guerrilla groups in 1973 the Lebanese army was considered by the right-wing parties unable to control the resistance. In response, these parties started to use the mountainous areas in the northern outskirts of Beirut as regular training sites in order to prepare to counteract the Palestinian resistance in the cities in case the army lost control of it, as it was described by a former Kataib fighter while recalling the escalation of tension prior to the war:

the Lebanese⁵⁷ parties realized that if the army was incapable of controlling the Palestinians, then the homeland would shift towards some kind of Arab-Palestinian-Islamic control. Starting from 1973, since the Lebanese army could not curb the Palestinians, there has been a good part of the former officers of the army and even of those who were still in the army in those days but who were working for the secret services, who had secretly prepared something that we call « the Organisation », the *Tanzim*. They tried to gather young Christians, mostly, who were against the Palestinian occupation of the country. This [organization] was secret and the people who were meeting within this organization did not know each other by name, they knew each other by number [...] Besides, starting from 1973 the Christian parties, essentially the Kata'ib, began to train their men [sic] for combat [...]. There was secret training, in certain regions of the country, where people – of which I am one – spent the weekends training instead of going dancing. They spent the weekends training, preparing, because there will be one day in which we will be brought to fight the Palestinians. (interview with Kata'ib former fighter, 22 November 2005)

This view is reinforced by the testimony of another former fighter that belonged to the grouping of militias known as *Harakah al Wataniyya* (National Movement):

⁵⁷ The use of the term “Lebanese” here is problematic and the positionality of the interviewee has to be taken into account. Speaking from the Kata'ib party perspective, in fact, the frustration at the army's management of the Palestinian armed activity outside the camps was framed within discourses of territorial invasion of Lebanon by the PLO. “Lebanese”, therefore, is to be intended here not as the totality of the political parties in Lebanon, but rather as the parties defending a certain territorial and political vision of Lebanon, notably one contrasting Pan-Arab schemes and faithful to France's territorial marking of Lebanon. The use of the term “Lebanese” in this passage has, therefore, a specific nationalistic and patriotic connotation.

when I was studying [...] there were people [with whom] I was not directly connected, but who were with me, also [people] from my neighbourhood, who had already had confrontations with each other. They were saying that they were already carrying weapons and training to fight [...]. [Among these] there were people both from Kata'ib and from Ahrar. (interview with National Movement former fighter, 1 December 2005)

Different positions taken by various political actors on the questions of the nature and legitimacy of the PLO in 1970s Lebanon impacted on the perception of the Palestinian people and organizations by different portions of the Lebanese population (Haddad 2000). These perceptions were often translated in the popular imaginary – as well as in the right-wing propaganda – through discourses about territorial aggression by the PLO, deliberate encirclement of the Christian neighbourhoods of Beirut by the Palestinian camps and general lack of security.

On another level, scholarly opinions on the links between Lebanon's socio-economic condition on the eve of the war and the outbreak of violence are several and debated between those who do not find links and those who suggest that some links between economic performance and war existed, mainly due to the uneven development that ran parallel to religious divides (El Khazen 2000: 250-251). Despite this controversy, it has resulted that class-based discourses pervaded the practices of urban fighting and impacted on the representation of the built environment during urban warfare, as we will observe later on, while analysing the case of the Holiday Inn battle. Affirmations that the war was political in its first phases and then turned into a sectarian conflict are present in scholarly works (Tarazi Fawaz 1994), but also in the popular imaginary: a former combatant once told that "at the time, there were no Muslims and Christians, there was left and right" (National Movement former fighter, 15 November 2005). However, the attempt to separate a moment in which political violence in Lebanon "eventually developed sectarian overtones" (Tarazi Fawaz 1994: 218) from one in which the confrontation was exclusively political is problematic to say the least because, as we saw in the previous chapter, since colonial modernity sectarianism and the political process have been inseparable in Lebanon. We can then say, that even if on

the eve of the war the vocabulary of political confrontation was mostly characterised by no or little explicit reference to religion, there were several moments in which confrontation turned into violence, whose political or sectarian nature was not always distinguishable. In the following pages I will present a number of episodes which contributed to accelerate the course of violence in some of the Lebanese cities in the mid-1970s. Rather than relying on a strict division between sectarian and non-sectarian types of violence, I propose to focus on the relational spaces produced by the interaction between specific socio-political situations and the material context in which they developed in order to conceptualise political violence in this phase of Lebanese history.

In the beginning of 1975, incidents broke out between the Lebanese security forces (the regular army) and the Palestinian resistance in southern rural towns after these had been stormed by the Israeli Defence Force due to Palestinian guerrilla operations against Israeli territory. Subsequently, the local population was displaced. The inhabitants of the south were increasingly frustrated by the Lebanese government because it did not seem able to control the territorial integrity of the south from the Palestinian/Israeli dispute. As a result, the local population stormed the town hall of the southern village of Kfarshouba which had suffered the consequences of this uncontrolled situation (El Khazen 2000). The PLO issue had pervaded the relations between Lebanese and between Lebanese and their army: in Kfarshouba, the overlapping of political matters, that until that moment had been conceived as relatively disjointed, acquired a sudden and violent material imprint.

Another major accident escalated the entanglement between the turbulent political climate, the socioeconomic unevenness, and the reactions to the Palestinian activity. On 27 February 1975, an unauthorised protest organized by the fishermen of the southern town of Sidon against the takeover of the fishing industry by a Lebanese/Yugoslav multinational company⁵⁸ turned into violence. On that day, Marouf Saad, one of the most influential local politicians in Sidon was walking at the head of the march and was shot under circumstances that remain still unclear; he died in a hospital in Beirut a week later. There have been several controversial attempts to outline a coherent hypothesis about the assassination, and there have been various interpretations of the circumstances

⁵⁸ One of the company's major stakeholders was President of the Republic Camille Chamoun – already strongly criticized by Lebanese leftist groups for his strong pro-Americanism. For more details, see el Khazen 2000: 270-273.

of the fishermen's demonstration – which according to some was unnecessary, considering the agreements that the fishermen's unions and the multinational had reached in the days previous to the demonstration (El Khazen 2000). In the interest of this study, it is important to understand how these socio-politically charged events also involved the material infrastructure of the city of Sidon and to see how specific social and political meanings rotating around the figures of Marouf Saad and the PLO representatives shaped the use and representation of Sidon during this phase.

Marouf Saad was considered by his fellow citizens and the Lebanese political scene as a local politician working closely with the people; in the 1950s he worked to bring Sidon – a city of the south outside the ray of Beirut's urbanization – within the orbit of President Chehab's program of territorial development for national unity which I will describe in the next chapter. Saad became *za'im* (mayor) of Sidon in the 1960s thanks mainly to the support of a left-wing urban network of political consensus in the city's old neighbourhoods (El Khazen 2000). Nevertheless, these quarters soon became the terrain of the political power struggle between Saad and the Palestinians, as local politics began being co-opted by the PLO. Saad's power as well as his spatial constitution gradually changed, with the growing PLO presence in the city (around which two of the biggest refugee camps extended) with the shifting support of the Lebanese left to the PLO since the 1967 war and the stipulation of the Cairo Agreement in 1969. Saad lost his municipal role in 1973.

As the Syrian-backed and pro-Palestinian militia *Asia* and the *Fatah* party opened their offices outside the camps into the city, the divide between Saad's sphere of influence (the inner city) and the PLO sphere (the camps) increased until the Palestinian resistance clashed in 1970 with Saad's *Tanzīm al Quwwah al Sha'bīya fī Sayda* (Organization of the Popular Force in Sidon) and the militias held Saad prisoner inside the camps so that

the humiliating treatment that Saad received at the hands of the guerrillas was an intolerable challenge not only to Saad personally but also to the 'dignity of Sidon', as many began to say publicly. Confrontations ended only after Nasser dispatched an envoy to mediate between the protagonists (El Khazen 2000: 277).

Even before Saad was shot, the PLO power network was already embedded within the urban infrastructure of Sidon. As soon as the news of his injury/death? spread, PLO armed men entered the city streets and quickly sealed off Sidon from the rest of Lebanon by blocking the coastal road going north and instituting check points throughout the city. Clashes between the Palestinians and the Lebanese security forces went on for four days and eventually the city was reopened. In the events preceding the start of the civil war, the built environment of Sidon was the reflection through which different discourses of power (the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese leftist) contested each other; also, the city became a site acting as a collector of meaning, a medium, a material tool to affirm the practices of the different militant groups. Moreover, Sidon became a site loaded with geopolitical meanings – Egyptian president Nasser even decided to send an envoy to the contended city – and a city in which geopolitical power networks converged and materialised. Thus, through the extreme act of sealing the city off, the PLO stated its territorial presence within and through the material infrastructure of Sidon. The political geographies of Sidon in the mid-1970s express this entanglement between the question of the role of the PLO in Lebanon, its relations with Lebanese state institutions and its integration in Lebanese local politics. Both the power networks of the Palestinian guerrillas and those of Marouf Saad developed materialised in and were affirmed through Sidon's material fabric: its neighbourhoods, its buildings and its streets became the terrain where these actors contested their power and eventually clashed, and where finally the Palestinians prevailed by taking control of the city and of the physical and political access to it.

While the circumstances of Saad's shooting are still debated, another event in 1975 – the Ayn al Rummana bus shooting – also remains encircled by mystery. However, it became famous in the popular imaginary because it is considered to be the 'real' first spark for the civil war, so much so that 13 April 1975, the date of the incident, has been always commonly considered as the anniversary of the outbreak of the war and is celebrated with official ceremonies. The incident took place at around noon on Sunday 13 April 1975 in the south-eastern suburb of Ayn al Rummana. A bus transporting a group of Palestinians returning from a public gathering in the Sabra refugee camp in the south of Beirut was caught in a gunfire ambush and twenty-seven of its passengers lost their lives. The attack is thought to have been a response to another shooting that had taken place in the same area a few hours earlier, when a car transporting disguised armed passengers did not stop at a roadblock and instead started shooting at the guards.

The roadblock had been erected by the private guards of Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Kataib party who was attending a church service in the vicinity. In a matter of hours after the bus shooting, fighting spread in the city suburbs and in the Palestinian camps of Dekhwaneh and Tall el Zatar in the eastern suburbs, leaving forty dead (Chami 2005). Shooting then continued particularly intensely between the two neighbourhoods of al Shiyyah and Ayn al Rummana.

There is no commonly agreed version of the facts of April 13th 1975. Only recently detailed and polyphonic accounts have been produced, such as El Khazen's (2000: 285-292); a videotape of an interview released by the bus driver has also been broadcast (al Issawi *et al.* 2001). Interrogating multiple sources, El Khazen (2000) has questioned several elements of the Ayn al Rummana accidents – such as the sudden and unexplained road diversions and the disappearance of the driver involved in the morning shooting from the hospital where he was treated for injuries – and has stressed some aspects that may suggest the that the accident was planned. This hypothesis is still controversial, and opinions oscillate between a cautious supposition or questioning and an intention to state the 'bare facts', as these accounts of two former fighters – one of which witnessed the immediate aftermath shooting – suggest:

Until nowadays, nobody understood why this bus passed through the streets of Ayn al Rummana and more specifically next to the church where there had been the assassination of Abu Asim⁵⁹: at that moment, in that part of Ayn al Rummana the Kataib members were furious and they all had weapons, and suddenly a bus appears, transporting armed Palestinians. They gave several explanations, but I know that if I put myself in the shoes of those who were there [...] I would not hesitate to shoot. [...] Now people give an enormous number of interpretations [...] after 30 years, if you look back you can actually say that it was more likely to be set up than accidental. (Anonymous interview 2005g)

We [...] got on the bus that was going down to the centre, and we entered [...] between al Shiyyah and Ayn al Rummana [...] the only separation was a road. We never thought that it [the shooting] could happen. In the end we are children of the same country. So we cut across, and we found that they had shot at a bus. Then, we

⁵⁹ One of Pierre Gemayel's bodyguards.

got off and the driver then said “Everybody go home”. At first, we were not aware of what had happened, we only knew that they shot a bus which was carrying Palestinians and that the responsible [actor] for the area was the Kata’ib party. (Anonymous interview 2005c)

These statements are dense with spatial references: the witnesses question why the bus passed by “that part of Ayn al Rummana” and “in the vicinity of the church”; they explain carefully the location of the entrance to the neighbourhood “between al Shiyyah and Ayn al Rummana” (the two quarters of al Shiyyah and Ayn al Rummana are separated by a road and belonged to different electoral districts since the 1960s); they stress the presence of a political affiliation of the place, the Kataib’s responsibility in the area.

Many (El Khazen 2000; Corm 2005 among others) consider the Ayn al Rummana shooting as the event that gave a sectarian turn to the Lebanese turmoil. Some scholars have also interpreted the events in hindsight, associating its geographical specificity with sectarian categorizations by arguing that the reason why the war broke out in Ayn al Rummana is not random, but on the contrary it is caused by the position of an homogeneously Christian Ayn al Rummana in a Muslim surrounding of equally religiously homogeneous low-income neighbourhoods and Palestinian camps (Sarkis 1993). However, Sarkis’ retrospective argument misses the complexity of the relations between demography and religion in the area, especially when we consider Myriam Ababsa’s (1999) study on Ayn al Rummana’s population mobility before and throughout the war years. According to this analysis, in fact, there existed a process of homogenization in the religious demography of the two neighbourhoods – people moved to areas of the same religious belonging – but this process was a gradual and contested one that took place amidst the course of the hostilities in 1975, rather than being a situation that was already in place *ex-ante*. Specific social processes, themselves rooted in the modern colonial construction of the sect as politically relevant, framed Ayn al Rummana as a place with a homogenous and discrete Christian identity. Accepting a relation of causality between the Christian-ness of Ayn al Rummana and 13 April 1975 means approving a vision of sectarian violence that privileges primordialism, as it assumes the a-priori existence of the sect outside the social process and considering every event of the war with this structural hindsight. My concern,

instead, is to look at how violence was produced contextually; rather than focusing on a supposedly pre-existent 'community sense' of the neighbourhood, I argue it is more useful to ask how space and specific social processes – including political violence – are reciprocally influenced. In other words, the question to pose in the case of the Ayn al Rummana shooting is which socio-political processes shaped the space in which the shooting happened and how this space triggered new socio-political meanings and practices that re-imagined the neighbourhood throughout the duration of the war.

Historians and political scientist have often tried to identify the causes and modalities that determined the unprecedented intensity of the events following the shooting of Ayn al Rummana. El Khazen (2000), for example, has argued about the uniqueness of size and intensity of the 13th April events, but this point becomes weak once we compare this with precedent episodes of violence in the country. For example, the Israeli raids in South Lebanon and the subsequent displacement of hundreds of villagers can be considered as an event on a wider geographical scale (if we take into consideration structural visions of this idea), as it involved the intervention of a foreign army and, therefore, transposed the PLO question in Lebanon on an international perspective. On the other hand, the Sidon events of the previous months unfolded on an equal urban scale as Ayn al Rummana, but El Khazen does not make clear how the mass mobilisation involved in that occasion and the intervention of the army after the seizure of the city by the PLO could be considered as less intense and vast than the reactions to the Ayn al Rummana shooting. Rather than a structural consideration of scale, it might be instead worth adopting a qualitative judgement in order to analyse the events of 13 April 1975. The geographical specificity of the site where the war was triggered is given by the unique reciprocal combination of Ayn al Rummana's urban environment (the neighbourhood, the streets, the buildings, and even the material history of these spaces) and the social practices in this locality. In this way, the space of Ayn al Rummana stops being a passive backdrop where these events simply unfolded like they could have done anywhere else (Khazen 2000), and we can start to envision it as a particular spatiality in which specific social realities shaped a contested space and this – in return – produced radicalised discourses of sectarian political identity among the militias and the population.

4.3 The Two Years' War

El Khazen argues that “the site of the incident was of little importance. The shooting could have taken place in another part of the city and on another occasion, for in the mid-1970s there was no dearth of sites or pretexts for violence” (2000 286). The location and the specific spatial characters of the site of Ayn al Rummana are presented as an interchangeable background. I argue instead that the location of the shooting matters, although not in the retrospective and uncritical sense that Sarkis (1993) indicates by reproducing the discourses of sectarian homogeneity, enclosure and encirclement. The social process and the material urban fabric in Ayn al Rummana instead constructed each other, producing a specific spatiality in which the clashes were generated and escalated (Figure 5, p. 118).

In the following week, fighting reached the coastal towns of Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre, until the secretary-general of the Arab League Mahmood Riad proclaimed a ceasefire that lasted for four days starting May 16. Two other *jawlāt* (“rounds” of fighting) followed between 20 and 26 May and between 30 May and 30 June, and battles took place also in the western parts of Beirut, in the coastal town of Damour and in the north of the country. Although it was extending, the fighting in the first weeks of the war was mainly confined to the suburban areas of the capital, and daily routine in the city centre went on practically uninterrupted. Nevertheless, in late September 1975, the centre of Beirut for the first time became the theatre of militia fighting and of territorial partition as the Christian and so-called “isolationist”⁶⁰ militias, guided by the Lebanese Phalanges, established their presence in the part of the centre overlooking the harbour, which they renamed “Fourth Sector” (*al qita‘ al Ruba‘*). During the following month, the Palestinian and the Lebanese militias reunited in the Harakah al Wataniyya (see

⁶⁰ The term “isolationism” (*‘aṣl: Inti’zal*) – used besides the term “rejectionist” – identified the Kata’ib party and its allies (mainly the Ahrar party) after Kamal Joumblatt’s call for it to be banned in the Spring of 1975 and after a common declaration by “23 pan-Arab and leftist parties and groupings drawn from several Arab countries and headed by Joumblatt” and strongly influenced by communist leader George Hawi (el Khazen 2000: 288) announcing a plan for the political and economic isolation of the Kata’ib party on the Arab scene. Initially conceived as a measure to defuse tension and avoid military escalation, the isolationism policy had the result to instigate a highly defensive spirit among the Kata’ib ranks and Christian population, which began seeing the party as the only possibility against PLO military domination. The most eloquent effect of the isolationist policy consisted of Prime Minister Rashid el Solh presenting his resignation speech in the form of the accusation of the Kata’ib party of provoking the shooting of Ayn al Rummana, which signed the moment of the political wreckage when “as he finished his [...] speech, Solh left the podium and ran quickly outside the hall amidst the objections and shouting of many deputies. Kata’ib deputy Amin Gemayel hurled himself to the door trying to prevent Solh from leaving before hearing the Kata’ib party reply to his accusations” (el Khazen 2000: 289. For photographic evidence of the moment, see also Chami 2005: 28).

Chapter 2) and began repositioning themselves in Kantari, a neighbourhood on the hills in the west of the city centre where the tower buildings of the main hotels were located. On 27 October 1975, what is known as the “war of the towers” began between the Phalanges and the Murabitun militia, with the former positioned in the Holiday Inn Hotel in an attempt to break into the area controlled by the National Movement militias, and the latter taking over the Murr Tower (*Burj al-Murr*) in the vicinity of the hotel.

- 1) 13/04/1975: Ayn al Rummana accident
- 2) 18/09/1975: Kata'ib first attack the city centre
- 3) 8/10/1975: the Hotels Battle begins
- 4) 6/12/1975: "Black Saturday"
- 5) 23/03/1975: fall of the Holiday Inn and closure of the Green Line

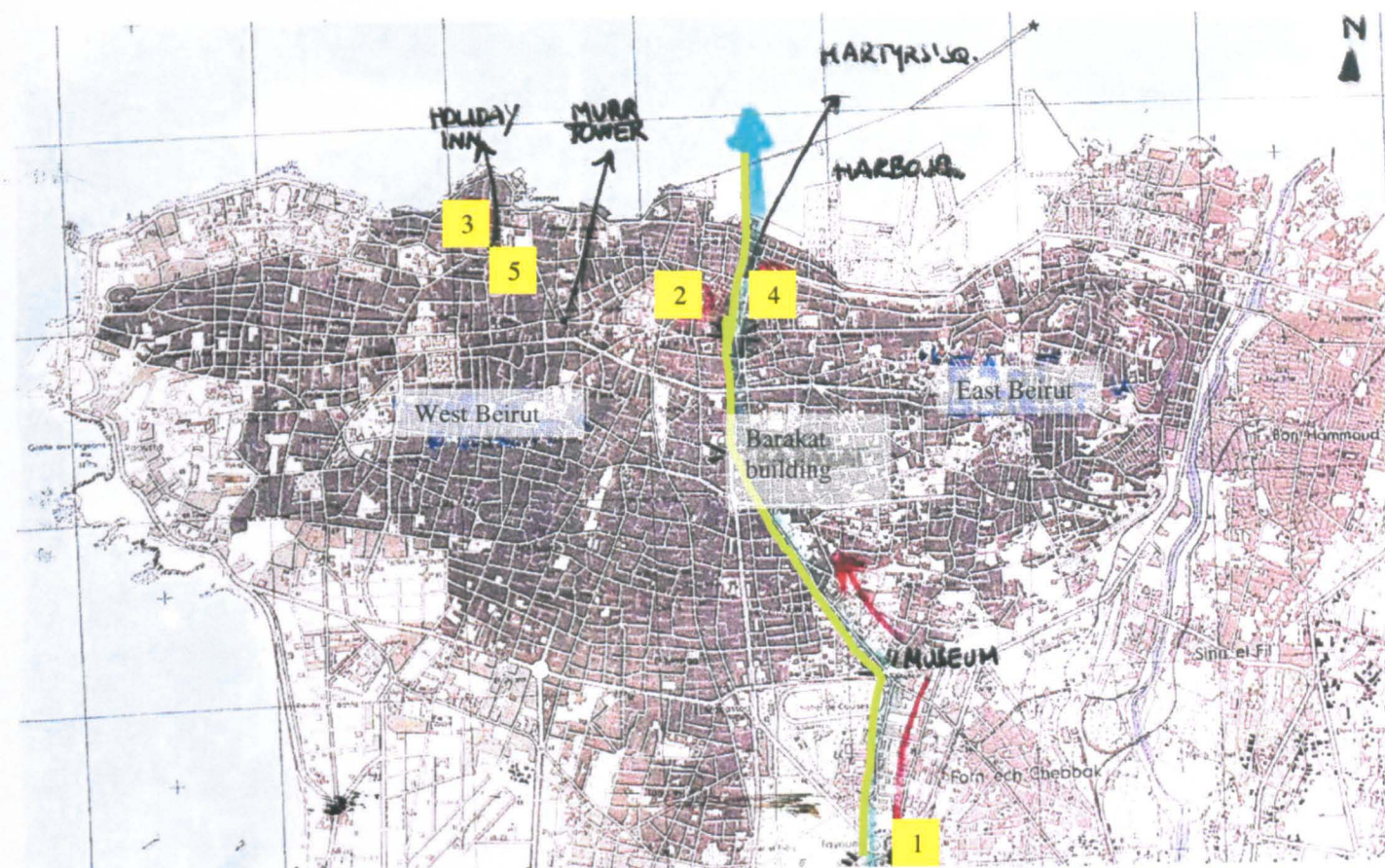


Figure 5. Map showing the formation of the green line along the fighting in 1975 and 1976. In black are the main landmarks. Numbered, are the main events which sparked increased fighting. Map modified by the author. Scale not indicated at the source. Source: Maps of Beirut from 1964 – 68. Detailed map of Beirut and environs from 1968. <http://tinyurl.com/586dlj>. Page accessed on 28 March 2008.

Amidst diplomatic mediation⁶¹ and the continuation of Israeli air raids against the Palestinian resistance in the southern areas of the country, faith-based and territorial violence in Beirut culminated on 6 December 1975 with the events remembered as “Black Saturday”. During that day, the killing of four members of the Phalanges triggered a reprisal including the random killing of Muslim civilians in the streets of the city centre and in a series of intense rounds of combat that lasted one week before a ceasefire was reached and the Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn were evacuated in mid-December.

Some of the deadliest clashes between the isolationist militias and the National Movement took place in the beginning of 1976, as the Palestinian refugee camps of Tell al-Zatar and Jisr al-Basha in the east of the city were put under the Phalanges’ siege. The National Movement’s reprisal consisted of attacking the neighbourhood of Horsh Tabet at the southern limits of Beirut municipal boundaries. The attack-reprisal pattern was repeated in the following days when, in reply to the Phalanges’ massacre of the residents in the Karantina slum next to Beirut’s harbour, the National Movement forces targeted the Christian population of the town of Damour, south of Beirut. A ceasefire encouraged by Syria was implemented and the deployment of the Lebanese army in the guerrilla hotspots continued, but what has been called “the war of the barracks” began as Lieutenant Ahmed Khatib formed his “Army of Arab Lebanon” in the Bekaa valley in the east of the country. Shortly after another army general, Aziz Ahdab, executed a military coup urging President of the Republic Sleiman Frangieh to resign, and his action was soon joined by Lieutenant Ahmed Khatib. Between 21 and 23 March 1976, what has been called the “battle of Beirut” or the “Battle of the Hotels” (*Ma‘raka al-Fanadiq*) culminated in the Kantari neighbourhood around the hotels, where after six months of confrontation, National Movement militias took over the Holiday Inn from the Phalanges fighters that were barricaded inside. The aim of the battle was to gain as much territory in the centre of Beirut as possible, but the modalities of the violence were much more complex than a quest for territory: neither a passive object serving tactical aims, nor a symbol of identity existing a priori, the built environment was part of the active, daily and contested production of the geopolitical imaginations of the militias.

⁶¹ In November 1975, both Vatican emissary Cardinal Paolo Bertoli and UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim travelled to Beirut to call for peace.

Until May the fighting continued across the whole country and in Beirut, amidst the attempts of installing a truce and despite the signature on 14 February 1976 of the Damascus Agreement, a document that was aimed at ending hostilities and at reinstituting the integrity of Lebanon in avoidance of the internationalization of the conflict. In the summer of 1976 isolation and scarcity afflicted Beirut as the airport closed down, the power supply was cut due to the damage caused by the fighting and water and medicines were lacking, while more and more foreigners evacuated and many Lebanese sought escape by sea. Attacks and reprisals went on involving both the Palestinian camps and the cities, and in July 1976 the Palestinian camps of Tell el-Zatar fell because of the Phalanges' siege that had been occurring for almost two months.

It was only between October and November 1976 that, in the course of two meetings in Riyadh and Cairo, PLO chief Yasser Arafat suggested a solution to the conflict that was then deliberated by the representatives of six member states of the Arab League – Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait – as well as by the PLO. The two key points of the solution to the conflict were the implementation of the Cairo Agreement (see Chapter 3), to be supervised by a committee of four Arab states, and the economic and military engagement of the Arab League in Lebanon. The latter was translated into the institution of an Arab Deterrent Force (ADF), a military contingent under the guide of the Lebanese president, Elias Sarkis, to be deployed across the whole Lebanese territory. This formula was put into practice through the ceasefire that started on 21 October 1976 and through another meeting in Cairo. Between 10 and 15 November, the ADF entered Lebanon and Beirut from the mountains in the north of the capital and subsequently deployed through the city. The deployment consisted of thirty thousand soldiers – mostly Syrian but also Libyan, Saudi and Sudanese. The Two Years' War ended. Towards the end of November the airport reopened and in December a new government was formed by Prime Minister Salim el Hoss on request of the President of the Republic Elias Sarkis.

Throughout 1977 the truce held, despite a number of skirmishes and harbingers of further complications. The south of Lebanon was in turmoil, though, as Israel and the Palestinian resistance often confronted each other; the Israeli army used air power against the Palestinian resistance in the Lebanese villages; economic recession doomed the country and the Cairo Agreement aimed at keeping the Palestinian weapons within

the perimeters of the camps⁶² was re-implemented with difficulty. While peace slowly returned, diplomatic visits followed each other and international aid arrived. Nevertheless, tensions ran high as various political personalities lost or risked their lives in car bomb attacks and other types of sabotage. On 14 March 1978, in reprisal for a bus hijacking by the PLO and following shooting on the road between Haifa and Tel-Aviv, Israel launched “Operation Litani” in the south of Lebanon – where the PLO commando had arrived by sea. The operation aimed at creating a buffer zone free from the Palestinian resistance from the Israeli northern border to the banks of the river Litani. The events attracted the attention of the international community with wider resonance than in the past phase: the United Nations passed resolution 425 and 426 calling for the respect of the territorial integrity of Lebanon and instituted United Nations Interposition Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) retreated in the same month, leaving the control of the buffer zone to the South Lebanon Army headed by Christian major Saad Haddad. In June 1982, following the assassination of the Israeli ambassador in London by the group Abu Nidal, the IDF began “Operation Peace for Galilee” during which air strikes were carried out regularly on Lebanon and especially against the city of Beirut.

4.4 Conclusion

The relations between aerial warfare and the imaginative geographies that they produce have been widely investigated (Gregory 2006; Hewitt 1983, Lindqvist 2003). There are profound material and epistemological differences between asymmetric urban guerrilla warfare versus the use of airpower. In the latter, for example, the reliance on the objectivity of military technologies turns the urban terrain into a detached and sanitized blank space, reducing the bodies of the victims to “disembodied abstractions” (Gregory 2004: 54) like points on a map. The use of air power by the IDF in Lebanon also bears these material and cultural implications, the analysis of which – although much needed – falls beyond the scope of this research, which instead focuses on the reciprocities of the geopolitical visions of the international relations actors, and the militias fighting on the ground, and finally on the material imprint of these practices and discourses.

⁶² Since 1948, six official Palestinian camps were instituted in Lebanon under the administration and humanitarian support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA determined the legal extension of the camps, outside of which every construction was formally prohibited to refugees (Gedeon 1974). In practice, the Palestinian camps have merged with the Lebanese slums by extending beyond the UNRWA limits of the camps with the subsequent waves of refugees from Palestine (Fawaz 2003).

In the next chapters I will interpret written documents produced by international diplomacy side by side with visual and oral histories related to militia practices during the urban fighting. This is a contrapuntal reading that aims to shift away from the discursive analysis of written official documents as a main method critical geopolitics (Thrift 2000) by reading side by side official documents with informal and unofficial accounts of everyday practices of fighting that also contributed to shape geopolitical narratives about Lebanon and its place in the world. In particular, I will show how Beirut's built space – its buildings, its streets and so on – far from being a passive background for the unfolding of the war events, played a major role in the constitution of geopolitical imaginations about the Lebanese nation-state and about its place in the world, imaginations that could not transcend from discourses about international politics being shaped in official environments. In return, official geopolitics used scripts that framed Lebanon according to Orientalist, deterministic and cartographic tones that owe much to the colonial imaginative geographies. It is thus in these reciprocal shaping of the space of the militias and the space of official geopolitics that I will now situate the reasoning about urbicide in Beirut.

Chapter 5. Official Geopolitics And The Lebanese Civil War Between 1975 And 1976: Territoriality, Orientalism, And Sectarian Determinism

President: [...] we are evacuating Americans from Lebanon. We began announcements on VOA and BBC because communications in Beirut are so poor [...].

Kissinger: We will evacuate tomorrow. We will not announce the route. [...] We don't know how many will leave. Many have no other real home, but there is no security in Beirut. But none of the responsible groups has any real interest in killing Americans, because if there was, it could be done quite easily at any time. But there are, of course, totally irresponsible elements. [Classified passage] Lebanon is a tragedy.

(White House 1976b)

5.1 Introduction

In the early phases of the civil war, Beirut – once a vibrant Mediterranean metropolis – was described as a city abandoned by part of its residents, businessmen and tourists. Once the last sign of the “Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval”, Beirut had been effaced by violence and destruction, as a French journalist reporting on the civil war commented (Gregory 2004: xiv; Said 2003: 1), Beirut – the lost Orientalist dream of encounter between East and West and coexistence in difference – came to be defined as a chaotic maze where the only people venturing were journalists, diplomats in swift missions, foreign secret services and combatants. Discussing the exodus from Beirut, *Time Magazine* (1975) described how, once the fighting had engulfed the city, the exodus from Beirut caused the dire economic and social conditions. One of the main consequences of the exodus was the flow of capital and people towards other Mediterranean cities, principally Athens, or northern European cities such as Paris and London:

for decades Beirut had been a magnet for banks and big corporations, a city that took pride and profit in the swarms of glittery limousines that kept its avenues constantly clogged, the fashionable boutiques, the expensive nightclubs and casinos, the whole ambience of opulence and sin. But no one wants to invest or play in a battlefield. For weeks now a full-scale exodus has been under way, and

many U.S., British, French, German and Japanese firms are relocating in Athens, an hour from Beirut by air (Time 1975)⁶³.

The international community, in contrast to the media, had the tendency to overlook the complexity of the urban warfare. However, it used similar metaphors of chaos and danger that were common in media representations. Framing Lebanon within the wider Arab region, or within the two-block Cold War international balance, the international community tended to consider the militias as the product of fanaticism or as a symptom of wider geopolitical developments taking place beyond Lebanon's borders. In other words, the international community did not regard the militias as entities with their own political agendas. The city of Beirut itself, as we will see in the following pages, remained a background to international diplomatic statements and to the unfolding of international developments acted out on the ground by the 'local' militias rather than as a site where geopolitics was actively produced and contested actively by the militias themselves.

The discursive analysis of the geopolitical scripting of Lebanon in 1975 and 1976 highlights the presence of a state-centred geopolitical perspective. This perspective, however, obfuscates other sites where everyday practices – such as the militia fighting and propaganda – produce geopolitical meaning. The formal international scripts of the Lebanese war were dominant, but were only partial and disembodied ways of representing a war whose spatial constitution was produced also in other sites. In coupling the analysis of both sets of representations, I highlight the contested character of both, rather than declaring the validity of one upon the other, by enacting “an analytic that is contingent on context, place, and time, rather than a new theory of geopolitics or a new ordering of space” (Hyndman 2007: 36).

In the geopolitical visions of states such as Israel, the U.S. and France, Lebanon as a nation-state had been eclipsed, but what replaced it was nothing more than an irrational concatenation of sectarian massacres by warlords who – allegedly – acted exclusively in the interest of their sect⁶⁴. In other words, the international community viewed the

⁶³ The view is partial and it does not take into account the people – mostly from the low-income classes who did not migrate or who opted for temporary migration towards Syria. Migration from Beirut was a very specific moment in the wider, and deeply complex, context of the Lebanese diaspora (for the history of the Lebanese diaspora see Hourani and Shehadi 1992).

⁶⁴ A critical view of the contested relationships between militia formation and sectarian identity is found in Rowayheb's (2006) study of cross-religious militias and their mechanisms of construction of identity. Sectarian identity as a construct that is reproduced through context-specific interactions between militias

warring communities of Lebanon as discrete entities with no rationale for fighting except for their local feuds. What instead I wish to show is that the militias legitimated their discourses and practices of urban fighting through constant references to a number of geopolitical scripts that were also used by the international community. My aim is, therefore, to unpack the notion according to which nation-state and sectarian militia constitute two irreconcilable expressions of power, and two distinct configurations of the Lebanese political and spatial history, by observing the ways in which these expressions of power overlapped rhetorically and concretely in the urban space.

International diplomacy represented Lebanon geopolitically between 1975 and 1976 according to three main scripts that I have identified by analysing sixteen documents including transcripts of official speeches and interviews, minutes of meetings and official conversations that took place among the representatives of a selected group of countries. The first script regards the state-centrism permeating the evaluation of the relevance and features of the civil war – a perspective that rarely or never took into consideration the complexity and spatial concreteness of the conflict such as the urban warfare or the militia structure. The second script regards the Orientalist tropes recurring in international relations while representing the war. One example of this is the idea of a ‘traditional’ Lebanese nation that served as refuge to a mix of ethno-religious communities from centuries prior to the birth of Greater Lebanon. This idea had also become one of the main slogans for the various currents of nationalism that were present in Lebanon between the 1900s up to the independence years (see Chapter Three). However, the refuge metaphor – in the mid-1970s as well as in the colonial era – was coupled with a further one of dismemberment and rivalry between religious groups that have always been, are, and will be, inexorably different. The religious sect is a third script that geopolitics employed in order to frame the Lebanese conflict. Through what we could define as “sectarian determinism”, formal geopolitical perspectives viewed Lebanon as a panorama of distinct sects. As the imperial European powers did in late Ottoman Lebanon, the international community in the 1970s used the sect as the tool for making order out of the ‘chaotic’ Lebanese space and society. This is a trope which bears the legacy of the colonial political and social taxonomies that restructured the society in this part of the Mediterranean Levant during colonial times.

and militia members, such as conscription, organisation, membership, recruit. These practices explain the existence of various types of militias: if a number of them were recruited mainly according to religion, several of them were heterogeneous from the point of view of religious identity and drew on other parameters to construct their agendas, such as Arabism.

5.2 The Territorial Script: Justifying Non-Intervention

We have seen in Chapter 3 how modern state territoriality contributed not only to shape the boundaries of Lebanon as we know them, but also to develop the idea of the sect as a main component of the political identity of the Lebanese, through the employment of the sect in forging the electoral and administrative policy of the territorial state. The sect became therefore the main unit which composed – like in a mosaic – the modern nation state of Lebanon. This vision became dominant, and sectarian political relations overtook the genealogical ones which were in place until the late Ottoman era. John Agnew (1998) calls “territorial trap” the common belief that the only way to represent global politics spatially is one based on the nation-state, meaning a political map of the world is usually one composed by nation states and drawn exclusively along nation-state borders. This conception implies an a-historical vision of national frontiers as spaces existing *a priori* rather than as contested and political sites, and it does not recognize their historically and geographically specific origin. The territorial state discourse is pervasive in geopolitics where issues of security and defence are shaped along ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ affairs – thus making it impossible to elude national borders when analysing world politics. These distinctions also exclude any non-state configurations of world politics. In this perspective, nation-states are the main territorial units constituting the discourses of global politics, as if they were situated in a world whose ‘parts’ interact only through inter-national relations.

The geopolitical approach to Lebanon between 1975 and 1976 presents a state-centred look upon the situation in the country, and the space of the nation-state is made, borrowing Ó Tuathail’s words, the “omniscient narrator of territory” (1996b: 12). The characteristics of non-state actors such as the militias, the Lebanese party leaders and the Palestinian resistance groups, as well as the civilian population, rarely constituted the subject of international diplomatic talks and the specific dynamics in which these actors were involved were rarely acknowledged and were left vague, devoid of concreteness and related to generic allusions to fanaticism and hatred. However, a small part of these documents present detailed insight in the Lebanese sub-national geographies, especially in the case of the militant Palestinian resistance groups prior to

the beginning of the civil war. Israeli Defence Minister Shimon Peres defined these groups as “terrorist organizations” that were different from each other in terms of their composition, the origin of their economic support, the amount and quality of their weapons and the aims of their ideologies. The list that Peres provided included nine groups that later took active part in the war: Fatah; Saiqa; Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine; Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine – General Command; Front for the Palestinian Popular Struggle; Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine; National Arab Youth Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1975). Shimon Peres’ address to the Knesset on 6 January 1975 took into consideration the Lebanese sub-national geopolitics, and defined the territory, “Fatahland”, which included the areas of South Lebanon under the control of the Fatah Palestinian resistance:

these organizations have entrenched themselves in Fatahland, in Southern Lebanon, between the Litani and the Israeli border, and in camps. Two of the more important of these camps are situated south of Beirut and north of Rosh Hanikra. These forces have recently been joined by a Palestinian terrorist unit, which came from Syria to Lebanon, equipped with combat vehicles including anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, and has been deployed in the terrorist concentrations in the Beirut area and in southern Lebanon. (Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs 1975)

The detailed report about the geopolitics of Palestinian militant activity in Lebanon by Peres remarked on the thin fault line between the “internal affairs” of Lebanon and their potentially international consequences, which would require military intervention. This strategic aspect seemed to be the relevant one for the international community in the economy of this speech, rather than the recognition of the specific organization of these non-state actors.

The civil war in Lebanon between 1975 and 1976 was geopolitically constructed as a local matter. Judgements regarding the inhumanity of the situation in the country were frequent, but they also recognised the impossibility of the international community to act militarily because the events were regarded as exclusively Lebanon’s internal affairs, and mingling with them would mean to interfere with the sovereignty of an independent nation-state. In describing “the agony of Lebanon” (White House 1976a), the most common expression was that of the country constituting a “severe human

tragedy” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976): “Lebanon is a tragedy”, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger affirmed during a Security Council Meeting in June 1976 (White House 1976b). In another statement, Minister Shimon Peres denounced that the world was acknowledging this tragedy in “apathetic and indifferent” ways, while Lebanon was “wallowing in its own blood” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976). The moral rhetoric about the “drama” of Lebanon was, nevertheless, not accompanied by any plan of concrete intervention in Lebanon and was limited to expressions of “amicable support” and “deep sadness and [...] preoccupation” (Paul VI 1975b); “sincere emotion towards a friend country,” “moral contribution”, “political support” and “efforts towards the re-establishment of the conditions for dialogue” (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères 1976c). The absence of intervention in Lebanon has been widely dealt with by Paul Salem (1992) who attributes the non-relevance of Lebanon in U.S. geopolitics not only to the American ignorance of the complexity of the Middle Eastern situation – a point raised also by Mayer (2002) regarding the U.S. media coverage of the Lebanese war – but also to the prevalence of an international balance between Egypt, Syria, Israel and Jordan to U.S. strategic interests, as well as to the controversial character of American interventionism following the Vietnam War. These perspectives also contributed to shape the geographical imaginations of Lebanon as a lost state which had plunged in chronic crisis. In the early years of the Cold War, the danger of territorial wars reflecting the U.S./U.S.S.R. conflict constituted the main preoccupation and dwarfed the need for sub-national knowledge of countries such as Lebanon. The intervention of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon in 1958 was exclusively aimed at containing a situation with potential to ignite international war. U.S. foreign policy under Kissinger almost entirely focused on boosting the peace process in the Middle Eastern region which involved state actors such as Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, so any other matter became secondary. The détente phase in the Cold War in the 1970s brought about a different attitude in U.S. foreign policy from 1958, which lasted until the 1983 attack to the U.S. Marines’ base of the international interposition force in Beirut. After this event, then U.S. President Ronald Reagan declared that

there was a time when our national security was based on a standing army here within our own borders [...]. The world has changed. Today, our national security

can be threatened in faraway places. It's up to all of us to be aware of the strategic importance of such places and to be able to identify them. (Reagan 1983)

This statement re-set the aim of U.S. intervention in Lebanon, which had already started changing in 1982 after the murder of President Bashir Gemayel, the infamous massacres at the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila, and the consequent creation of an international force of interposition in Beirut together with France and Italy. The polarization of Lebanese society in the previous phase in the 1970s, however, was viewed as a local or – occasionally – a regional issue which nevertheless needed a discrete amount of control to avoid a seemingly remote international confrontation in the region. Because the situation in Lebanon and its actors were not linked to any territorial danger to the international situation, “Lebanon was not perceived as being lost to the Soviet Union or to its clients; it was merely being lost to itself” (Salem 1992).

Categories such as “internal” and “foreign” affairs – which critical geopolitics attempts to deconstruct – are treated as givens in international foreign policy, but in reality they are contested through specific practices of reciprocal determination of what constitutes “danger” and what constitutes “security”, “home” and “foreign” affairs (Campbell 1992). The structural view of home and foreign affairs, however, rarely takes into consideration the multi-scalar and transnational character of the actors and processes that it attempts to categorise. Returning to Peres’s speech about south Lebanon’s “Fatahland”: as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4, the presence and activity of the Palestinian resistance groups in Lebanon was the product of trans-national and sub-national processes (Cairo agreement, the transfer from Jordan, and so on), but in international politics it was portrayed as exclusively ‘local’ politics with no ties to the outside. These trans- and sub-national dynamics were not taken into consideration by the Israeli geopolitics, which considered the militants merely as “irresponsible” and “extremist” (Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs 1975) but who became extremely relevant once their actions threaten the international realm. Another example of the absence of any contextualization in the representation of these groups is the fact that the Peres government ascribed the proliferation of these actors to the weakness of the Lebanese state. Peres used a “wilderness” metaphor to explain Lebanon’s loss of

territorial sovereignty. He depicted the Lebanese nation as a devastated body that was “being eaten away by a collection of terrorist organizations devoid of any responsibility, and jeopardized by camouflaged intentions to devour her independence” (Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs 1975). This representation of the ‘local’ geographies of the militant groups shows the Israeli government’s gaze based on state territoriality as the only language to explain international politics: the vision is one that considers the space of the nation-state as pre-existing history and society and compares it to a body that is ravaged by parasitic forces that have no relation with it whatsoever, but are taking profit of its fatal weakness and “devour” its territorial and national right to self determination.

Even if the transnational connections of the militias operating “both in Lebanon and outside” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1975) and their being “supported from outside” (White House 1976a: 3) are mentioned in various occasions, the war itself is described as belonging to the realm of domestic matters. During an interview, then French Prime Minister Jean Sauvagnargues⁶⁵ noted that “The problem in Lebanon is an internal problem, it’s a problem of renovation of the Lebanese structures; therefore, it’s a matter that concerns the Lebanese” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976d). This assignment of the Lebanese scenario to the scale of the local can be viewed in contrast to the fact that new foyers of conflict that transcended the “state vs. state” structure were beginning to be brought to the eye of international relations: in his speech to the UN General Assembly on 29 September 1976, just before describing the situation in Lebanon, French Foreign Minister de Guiringaud remarked that

to preserve future generations from the scourge of war, is the prime objective set by the chart [of international human rights]. If no military conflict, in the classic sense of the term, opposes nowadays the states, how can we not recognize that very recently foyers of crisis, be they open or potential, have been created? (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 1976b)

It is important to consider how countries assume different geopolitical value according to codes for interpreting world politics that vary over time. The changes in these codes influence the implementation of foreign politics. Territorial and military responses have recently been used to treat conflicts that transcend the territorial borders of the nation-states involved. In the recent cases of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the

⁶⁵ Jean Sauvagnargues was French Foreign Minister under President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing from 1974 to 1976. He was succeeded by Louis de Guiringaud.

frame of the war on terror, territorial measures were taken against a problem that is represented as trans-national – such as the “network” of terror characterising al Qaeda (Dodds 2005b). In contrast, no similar territorial response was used to tackle the problem of Lebanon which, as Henry Kissinger noticed several times (White House 1976a and 1976b), had the potential to ignite a regional territorial war. Kissinger needed to remind the members of Congress “that it is not a simple question of pushing troops into Lebanon” (White House 1976a: 2). A policy of non-intervention in the respect of the territorial sovereignty of Lebanon was implemented in this case:

Israel has never had any designs on Lebanon, her sovereignty or independence – nor has Israel any intention of interfering in that country's internal affairs. (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1975)

The policy of France with regard to Lebanon is inspired by one only desire: that of preserving the unity, the integrity and the sovereignty of this friend country. (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976e)

The value of the integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon became the first point in the “disinterested” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976c) agenda of the foreign policies of these states, which could do nothing but state their own opinion without imposing or interfering in what was seen as a conflict linked exclusively to Lebanon's internal affairs:

concretely, we cannot send troops! Nobody is asking us to do that. Let's not forget that Lebanon is an independent State. [...] We cannot but contribute to create the favourable conditions for a political solution, so that a political compromise can be found (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 1976d).

Making the Lebanese population responsible for finding a solution to the war also related to the reiterated distinction between internal and external affairs. As the problem was defined as internal to the Lebanese territory, it was somehow expected that the Lebanese people take up the duty to find a way out from the hostilities. This point emerged in the statements of French Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues who, on various occasions during his diplomatic activity argued that: “it is up to the Lebanese themselves to find outside every external interference a political solution that can only

put an end to the drama that divides them” (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 1976e) and also in the speeches of his successor De Guiringaud who, with strikingly similar rhetoric, prompted that “it is up [...] to the Lebanese themselves to find within dialogue the political solution that can only put an end to their fratricide struggles” (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 1976b).

The conception of the nation-state as a territorial container of society emerges from these statements: the territorial nation-state is a modern “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) projected towards the same values and sovereign over a population contained on a contiguous territory. The call for the Lebanese population to solve “their own” drama is not only territorial, but also assumes a natural attachment of a people sharing the same values and the same land. It is “from the success of this new association between values and territory [that] stem in fact the possibility to infuse respect, attachment and loyalty towards the State” (Minca and Bialasiewicz 2004: 91-92). The boundaries of the nation-state constitute the lines containing the “the necessary space of politics” (Minca and Bialasiewicz 2004: 92) in the cartographic gaze on world politics, and chaos instead lies outside or beyond this space. The belief in the moral and political synthesis of society and territory is at the basis of the geopolitics of the Lebanese conflict: the war is considered as a problem of reconciliation, one implying the need to make an effort to regain an original but lost national unity. Rather than being seen as a problem with contextual origins and characteristics, international diplomacy conceived the civil war as a deviation into chaos from an original coexistence, caused by extremist and by irresponsible forces. According to this perspective, it is to that originary condition that the Lebanese must decide to return, by renouncing violence and they “must become conscious that they are the only ones capable of stopping the fatal mechanism that is conducting their country to the breakdown” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976d). Also, according to the Vatican, the Lebanese must “renounce [...] with generosity and perceptiveness, the fighting and the destruction” (Paul VI 1975b). In these views, the Lebanese are the only ones who can bring *their* nation back from the ‘wrong’ path of sectarian fighting. In other words, the situation is described as an irrational diversion happened because of ‘irresponsible’ elements acting in the name of fanaticism leading the State to a breakdown. The Lebanese population, therefore, is called by the international community to return to a “balance” in Lebanon’s internal affairs.

These statements illustrate the way in which both the Lebanese population and the fighting militias were granted – within these geopolitical narratives – only a passive agency which, however, became full responsibility of “the Lebanese” (civilian and combatants indistinctively) when the international community urged them to solve the civil unrest to which they only had the key. In this context, nevertheless, granting responsibility to the Lebanese population to take control of the political condition of their country and re-insert it in its “normal” place in international politics, relies exclusively on arbitrary categories such as “home” and “foreign” affairs which, as we have seen, are the product of practices of power rather than natural givens.

5.3 The Orientalist Script: The Return Of The Refuge

During 1975 and 1976, state institutions in Lebanon were losing their monopoly on legitimate violence in favour of illegal armed militias connected with, and sponsored by, other territorial states as well as non-state actors. In the geopolitical imagination of the governments of France, Israel and the United States, Lebanon became a country that could be no longer explained according to a territorial logic. From the perspective of international diplomacy, Lebanon was a dismantled state, and its “reconstitution” was a matter that depended exclusively on the will of its own population to return to pacific coexistence.

Only chaos, uncertainty and difficulty to envisage any future scenario were now reigning in Lebanon, as reported by Shimon Peres in front of the Knesset:

Lebanon's more distant future is still shrouded in mist. No-one can foretell with certainty whether the human tragedy that has attended Lebanon has already in fact come to its end, or whether and how Lebanon will be reconstituted. The answers to these questions will clearly affect not only the fate of Lebanon and its citizens, but also the rivalries and dispositions in the entire region. One thing, I believe, is meanwhile clear beyond doubt: the former Lebanon, as we have known it over the past 50 years, will be no more (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976).

The imaginative geographies populating international relations not only construct visions of the world but also impact on the experience and practice of it: as Gregory argued, they “enter directly into its fabrication” (2004: 121) and are “centrally involved

in the actions of soldiers and cannons too” (2006a: 89). The imaginative geographies of Lebanon as a dismantled country constituted the foundations of a set of geopolitical architectures of enmity including various countries in the region (such as Syria and Israel) which then underpinned a policy of non-intervention to avoid a regional clash. The countries considered in my analysis did not intervene with any major action in Lebanon prior to 1982 when the international force of interposition, formed by French, Italian and U.S. contingents, was deployed in Beirut after Israel’s invasion of the country in 1978 and 1982. In the 1970s, it was agreed that the situation would not be solved by “pushing troops into Lebanon” (White House 1976a: 2). The only interventions within the Lebanese territory were the evacuation of the American embassy and the dispatching of various diplomatic envoys to the Lebanese capital. This had to do with the fact that – in this early phase – the geopolitical framing of the Lebanese war was one envisioning Lebanon within the regional Arab-Israeli peace and one that aimed at avoiding a major Soviet involvement (White House 1976a, 1976b). Imaginative geographies of the civil war depicted Lebanon as a country whose future was obfuscated by the “mist” of an intricate civil strife and recalled the orientalist trope of the division of the world between a space of modern “order” and one of oriental and pre-modern “chaos” and ambiguity. The categorizations of the factions acting in Lebanon used by Western diplomacy also carry the legacy of this orientalist “othering”. This is a process that uses cultural definitions to create a perception of certain identities, which construct them as enemies and unreliable actors in global politics. This is particularly reflected in the statements of the Israeli officials related to the discourse about the security of the Israeli northern border with Lebanon. Here, the figure of “the Arab” determined to destroy Israel (Said 2003) emerges, where the Palestinian resistance factions operating in Lebanon are defined as being inspired by “extremist philosophies” that “turned Lebanon into a land of lawlessness” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1975).

The geopolitical representation of Lebanon as puzzling and complex was not new to United States diplomacy. Lebanon occupied a prominent position in the American diplomatic concerns since 1958 (Salem 1992) after governments in Cairo and Baghdad were swept by Nasserite socialism amidst increasing American fears of a regional escalation. Clashes between progressive and conservative armed groups began to spread in 1958 in and around Beirut (see Chapter 3), leading the U.S. to send the Marines to Beirut in order to curb the skirmishes. This event and its importance were represented

and given relevance almost exclusively in connection with the potential consequences for a regional territorial war, but the composition, organisation and actions of the militias on Beirut's ground remained something perplexing for the U.S. government. Therefore, U.S. involvement in Lebanon revealed to U.S. diplomats and policy-makers the complexities and contradictions of Lebanese politics of which they had known only vaguely before. The Lebanon perceived by the U.S. after 1958 was one of bewildering diversity of faiths and shifting alliances (Salem 1992), and in the American geopolitical imagination this country remained an entity "so complex that it defies logic" (White House 1976a: 2). The following conversation between U.S. President Gerald Ford, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, and National Security Advisor Scowcroft at the White House illustrates once more the confused view of the situation on the ground:

Rumsfeld: The situation particularly defies logic as Henry tried to explain it
 to the Congressional leadership this morning.

President: They came in confused about the situation, as they usually do.

Scowcroft: And they left still confused but at a higher level

(White House 1976a: 2)

This shows a sort of geographical fetishism populating the imaginative geographies regarding the Lebanese war. Sparke (2005: xiv) has used the term geographical fetishism to indicate the selective and partial nature of any geographical (and geopolitical) description of the world. Geography is not a science, but rather a process that reveals struggles and contested power practices behind the static models it proposes. The geographical fetishism of the geopolitical imaginations about Lebanon lies in the fact that these views do not consider any other social process and site of spatial negotiation besides and beyond the nation-state discourse. Once the Lebanese state was dismantled by the militias, and – consequently – once the shared "association" between state territory and national values was disrupted, what remained was a land represented – once again – through images of chaos and which lacked reliable information. Lebanon became a space where international diplomacy could not perform and where solutions based on territoriality failed because the state was no more the legitimate narrator of politics and perpetrator of political violence. Therefore, once the nation-state was lost, chaos replenished the territorial vacuum in which Lebanon had plunged. The international community did not attempt to focus on different geographical narratives and territorial visions, whose actors – the militias, and

especially those supported by the states beyond the “iron curtain” – were confined instead to a murky realm of irrationality and unreliability. In a conversation with the members of the National Security Council, Henry Kissinger stated that

we have explored the idea of a neutral zone but there are too many undisciplined, criminal elements and there is no one to police them. A buffer zone without force is no good. (White House 1976a: 9)

In a call for international diplomacy to turn its gaze upon Lebanon, French officials exposed the worsening spiral of darkness and chaos in which Lebanon was kept by the warring factions:

the information that we receive is confused and contradictory. Only one thing is sure: that there are more and more victims among the civilian population and that this unfortunate country is more wounded everyday, and that all the concerned states will have to eventually comprehend that they will have to think about the safety of Lebanon and that this will be in everybody's interest (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976a).

The trope of the Lebanese nation as a wounded body, as it was also described by the Israeli government, returns in the description of the aggravating bleeding of Lebanon and the death of its population, a condition which should push the international scene to act in order to re-establish the “safety” of the nation and the state, for the sake of “everybody's interest” in avoiding a major regional war.

5.4 The Sectarian Script: The assumption Of The Historical Sect

One recurring point in the geopolitical scripts of Lebanon is its being a country populated by different but coexisting sects. But because these differences took over coexistence, the country has plunged into discordance and chaos. According to these scripts, these “innate” differences between sects form the fundamental unity of Lebanon, a unity constituted of the sum of the numerous, diverse and discrete “communities” that have been populating the area through its history, and of “all those

who, with their diversity, compose this country” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976e). As we learnt in Chapter 3, these representations of wartime Lebanon overlap with the colonial idea of Lebanon as a “refuge” for the persecuted and the outcast. This idea later developed into the vision of Lebanon as a “model state” for religious coexistence and tolerance – a motto which frequently returns also in the geopolitical discourse of the civil war. The country, defined as “the sole multi-communal state that existed in the Arab world” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976), was represented as a paradigm for multicultural harmony, especially by the French officials, who saw their predecessors as the creators of Lebanon as a modern state. They depicted Lebanon as “a small model-state, an example of tolerance in the Middle East, a state that we largely contributed to create” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976d) and “formerly a model of coexistence between different communities, left for little more than a year to an uncontrolled outburst of violence” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976b).

Once more, the double-tier imaginary of Lebanon as tolerant refuge and fatal battleground returns. The only apparent contradiction between the land of tolerance and that of rivalry is a powerful remnant of the modern taxonomies of the colonial era. In the conquest of the colonial “bodies and souls”, the “chaos” of religious mixing was resolved through the denomination and the legitimization of a clearly ordered sectarian landscape, whose layout was based on territorial formulas of coexistence and on the image of Lebanon as “safe haven”. Nevertheless, this Cartesian view onto the panorama of sects in Lebanon considers these as irreducibly different: they are stable, mappable and coexisting, but nevertheless unavoidably discrete. The irreducibility of the sect also composes the image of Lebanon as battleground; this is not a different image from the refuge, but only the other side of the colonial cartographic power of producing a rational spatial ordering of political identities in Lebanon.

The religious sect as the basis of national governance and territorial unity was constantly recalled in the geopolitical statements about the civil war. “The Christian community in Lebanon” was depicted as “Confronted by the Moslem [sic] community” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976), and the sectarian balance between the communities “surely different in their origin and features, but united in an intense activity for the love of the homeland” (Paul VI 1975b) was constantly recalled as the condition to which Lebanon should return in order to be granted peace and national reconciliation in that “exemplary stage of fraternity and collaboration” (Paul VI 1975b)

that characterizes it. In particular, the Christian community of Lebanon was represented through a particularly primordial gaze by Israel, for whom it is “implanted in its soil for countless generations” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976) and by the Vatican by emphasizing “the century-long ties uniting Lebanon to the church, through a history that goes back until the Apostle Saint Paul” (Paul VI 1975a).

Descriptions of the Lebanese warlords also conceive them as determined by their sect, whose actions are exclusively inspired by it, and void of individuality and of reason. Kissinger’s explanation of the Lebanese scenario describes the Druze and National Movement leader Kamal Joumlatt as a person whose “natural inclination will be to destroy the Christians” (White House 1976a: 3).

Deterministic tropes about unstoppable chains of feudal violence due to sectarian ‘inclinations’ concealed the complexity and contextuality of other events. By the end of 1975, the war was assuming the dimensions of humanitarian disaster: street fighting, snipers’ fire, random killings, sieges of neighbourhoods and of refugee camps, kidnappings and summary executions became everyday practice. But such violence was explained by the international community through metaphors such as “implacable mechanism” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976b), “fate” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1976), or even a “fatal gear dragging the country to explosion” (Ministère des Affaires étrangères 1976d). The socially constructed and contextual character of the violence in Lebanon was absorbed and obfuscated in an aura of inevitability; the agency of the actors who controlled the city of Beirut were also negated, and re-formulated in terms of “irresponsibility” and “irrationality” associated with an a-historical vision of the sectarian process.

5.5 Conclusion

During the first two years of civil war, foreign policy statements in countries such as France, Israel, the US, as well as the Vatican representatives, depicted Lebanon and the Lebanese according to three shared scripts: territoriality, orientalism, and sectarianism. Firstly, a nation-state centric approach stressed the separation between what was considered as “internal” problems of Lebanon such as the clashes between militias and the fall of the state institutions, and the matter which belonged to the “external” realm, that is to say the balance of power in the Middle East region. The former could not lead

to military intervention, but was given moral judgement; the latter required attention or – potentially – intervention. The result was that the first phases of the Lebanese civil war were depicted as an affair limited to the local realm which, therefore, did not deserve anything more than international sympathy.

Secondly, Lebanon was depicted using an Orientalist imaginary which bore a colonial legacy. This imaginary was constituted of narratives about the senselessness, irrationality and unavoidability of the war, narratives which labelled Lebanon an “illogical” and deceiving land, which could suddenly transform from a multicultural abode into a battleground for feuding faith-based groups.

The third script, according to which the sect determines the political reality of the Lebanese war, is also inspired by colonial taxonomies. According to this view, the Lebanese militia leaders’ actions are exclusively determined by their sect which international diplomacy appears to see as a natural given.

The view of Lebanon which resulted from these three scripts was one often informed by a general superficiality about Lebanese politics and society, especially in the case of the U.S., and it led to reductive positions because it did not consider the trans-national agendas of the militia groups, and instead focused almost exclusively on their religious ones. It produced Lebanon as a land whose territoriality had become ‘confused’, so much so that there was nothing any other government could do about it, apart from expressing sympathy to the civilian population and the officials. The Lebanese, after all, were the only ones – according to this view – who could stop the ‘tragedy’ from unfolding.

My analysis of the official geopolitical visions through which international relations interpreted the war in Lebanon constitutes only the first part of this genealogical critique of the spaces of politics of the Lebanese civil war. The next chapter expands the analysis into the investigation of the practices of urban warfare that these documents tended to consider as an unintelligible chaos. It also illustrates a series of practices and discourses reflected on, and produced through, the material fabric of Beirut. In this perspective, Beirut is viewed not as a passive backdrop for events to unfold, but rather as the site where ideas of Lebanese nation-state and its relation to other nation-states

were shaped, and where new envisioning of the city were produced also through destruction.

Chapter 6. Urban Geopolitics Of The Lebanese Civil War

Author: Did they pay you?

Participant: No, when I was participating [in the militia] we did not gain any money. They started making money when the chiefs of the Lebanese Forces thought that it was necessary to organize the militia and they began paying some of the units, but not for everybody. Samir Geagea took a decision: that we are an institution that must survive and in order to do this he set up organized boards of chiefs, salaries and structures. But in this phase the militias had already become close to an army with a strict structure.

(Phalanges former fighter, 31 October 2005)

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, we have seen how international politics conveyed a cartographic, Orientalist and deterministic representation of the civil war. The representatives of a number of countries such as France, Israel, the US as well as the Vatican dedicated little attention to the sub-national dynamics of the war compared with the strategic relevance that the international balance of power in the Middle East assumed. In this chapter, I will couple those official visions with unofficial accounts about the urban war to highlight their production of geopolitical meanings that are different from the official geopolitical narratives. For this purpose, I will analyse data from in-depth interviews together with a number of visual documents and written archival documents (see Chapter 2).

I will also address a number of aspects emerging from the empirical data about the relationship between geopolitics, representation, and the urban built environment in Beirut. Firstly, I will show how official and unofficial discourses reciprocally shaped each other rather than developing in isolation from each other. In the following pages I will analyse the spaces that this reciprocity produces. Official geopolitics overlooked the ways and the sites in which the militia exploited power devices proper of state government in order to create a new urban and national geopolitical vision. I will show, therefore, how the distinction between Lebanese internal and international affairs – which had shaped a significant part of the official imaginative geographies about the

Lebanese war as a local and fanatic issue – became blurred in the geopolitical imagination of the militias.

The second aspect addressed regards the contemporary concept of urbicide as a tool to understand relationships between political violence and the built environment in Beirut. During the civil war, Beirut's buildings and streets were sites where the militias acted out both their tactical necessities and their political motivations. I will attempt to explore the spaces of urbicide in Beirut as both materially constituted (produced by tactical necessities such as position, vision, cover, speed) and discursively shaped (produced by political significations, such as anti-Palestinian Lebanese nationalism; pan-Arab nationalism, Palestinian cause and so on). In other words, the idea of urbicide includes both the material sides of destruction, and the social meanings of it, and is about the lived space, the real-and-imagined terrain in which destruction takes place.

The third aspect addressed of the relationship between political violence and the built environment in Beirut is its legacy from Lebanon's colonial past and from the modern geometric logic implicit in cartographic territory. My vision of urbicide in Beirut is one that considers the built environment as tool for and product of the enactment of territorial representations of sect and territory.

6.2 The Reciprocal Shaping Of Official And Unofficial Geopolitical Knowledges

As we previously observed, any attempt to find a conclusive definition of the whole Lebanese war is a problematic task, and this difficulty is also reflected in the former combatants' interviews. The common denominator of the various definitions they gave was the reference to multiple geopolitical sites within and outside Lebanon, as this former Kata'ib militia fighter's attempt to define the war shows:

sometimes they call it "the civil war in Lebanon", which makes me laugh, because how could you call it "civil war", when you have thousands of Syrian soldiers, Israelis, above all the Palestinians, Americans, French and others: they have all fought here. So, what does "civil war" mean? That the citizens of this country fought each other? Yes, the citizens of this country fought each other, but it was part of a total war, there was also a war between the Israeli and the French, the Israelis and the Syrians, and also the Palestinians have lost thousands of soldiers

here. Therefore, it is not a Lebanese war, between the Lebanese only. Yes [the Lebanese] are part of a war but they are not the only ones, it was – in another way if you want – a regional war, we could say even an international war, because everybody participated here. (interview with Kata'ib former fighter, 31 October 2005)

The idea of an interconnection between the internal problems of Lebanon and the influence of external powers was reinforced by a local journalist who once told me that “Our people suffered and [they] paid a high price for a cause that it is not their cause. So we paid around one hundred fifty thousands martyrs [...] for a conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis; we have nothing to do with that conflict”. (interview with journalist, 25 October 2005)

Every attempt to enclose the war within exclusive geopolitical formulas, or to reduce it to the specific ideologies of this or that militia, always produced generalisations that overlooked the complexity of the conflict. The spatial configuration of the war, for example, changed through its various phases, and was produced by contested practices. For example, while the Two Years' War was considered a series of successive and escalating rounds of fighting, the war after 1978 was represented by the militias themselves as something looking more like a conventional war:

until 1976, they were rounds, but [they were] more and more serious and tough [...] the country was going towards a dark situation [...] we were entering the real war. We had never known or lived what is the real war, so we were preparing ourselves to [...] what we called the war, with a [capital] W. (interview with Kata'ib former fighter, 22 November 2005)

Far from being a blank canvas where battles unfolded, Beirut's built environment has been an active component in shaping these definitions of the war and in the production of the meaning of Lebanon within international politics. The following passage is taken from a 1976 editorial for the Lebanese magazine *Al Hawadess*, and it is dedicated to the dynamics of polarisation and hostility developing between the two neighbourhoods of al Shiyah and Ayn al Rummana in south-eastern Beirut. It reproduces the conversation between two members of rival militias who use different geopolitical narratives – the Pan-Arabist and the Lebanese nationalist – to explain “the Lebanese crisis”. These narratives are in turn animating the dispute in the two neighbourhoods and are enacted

through the attack to the built environment and the attribution of new meanings to it, as we will see shortly for the case of Ayn al Rummana. The Kata'ib fighter affirms that

the foundations of the Lebanese crisis [lies in the fact] that the Muslims are not convinced that Lebanon is their ultimate homeland, that it deserves to be defended by us; and that its internal affairs are above any other of the other Arab issues. (Al Lawzy 1975: 6)

Not only, were discourses and practices referring to spaces other than Beirut itself reflected on the built environment, but these references often drew from well-established assumptions in official national and international politics regarding the role of the nation-state. The idea that the state detains the monopoly of legitimate violence and juridical power was negated only in part by the militias: in the early phases of the war, the state, on the contrary, still constituted a territorial and political reference that was even invoked by the militias in support of their aims or when they made accusations against the other militias. In this sense, the normative conception of the state meshes with the spaces of the militias, who, therefore, act also in the light of – and not simply in negation of – the politico-spatial project of the nation-state. After the sectarian mass killings of “Black Saturday” in the centre of Beirut in December 1975, for example, Murabitun leader Ibrahim Kolehlat invoked a clear action from the part of the government and the army, in the areas of Beirut where it still detained control: “[Kolehlat] is astonished that the reaction of the state has not taken place in the moment in which the killers and the snipers raged within the same zones that had been invested by the army commandos” (*L'Orient le Jour* 1975a: 4).

The overlap between the official and the unofficial realm, between the state and the militias, reflected on the actions perpetrated against the built environment. Kolehlat's accusation to the state of mingling with the Isolationist militias is connected to the aggression against the famous hotel Saint-Georges, which was the first building in the hotel district located west of the city centre to be occupied by the militias when the National Movement took it over in late 1975. The army – according to Kolehlat – had deliberately not prevented the Isolationists from attacking the building where members of the Murabitun had to barricade after attempting to seize the Isolationists in the close surroundings: “[the Isolationists] attacked the St. Georges [sic] with incendiary bombs in order to displace the progressive elements. [The army] brought help to the fanatics

when instead we had surrounded them in the sector Starco-Hilton-Zeitoun” (*L'Orient le Jour* 1975a: 4).

Also on the Isolationist side, the role of the state continued to be present and, instead of disappearing suddenly, its disintegration was exploited and its functions re-elaborated within the militia. We have seen previously how the army – the symbol of the state’s monopoly of political violence – gradually reorganized itself along other types of combinations of national values and territorial outline, incarnated by the Organization (*Tanzīm*), which reunited members of the army who were willing to train groups of youngsters in guerrilla fighting in the first half of 1970s:

Starting from 1973 [...] when [we saw that] the Lebanese army could not curb the Palestinians, a good part of the former army officers and even of the officers who are still in the army today, and who work for the secret services, had been secretly preparing something that we call “the organization” the *Tanzīm*. They had been trying to enroll the young Christians who were against the Palestinian occupation of the country. It was all very secret, and the people belonging to this organization did not know each other by name, they knew each other by number. So [...] towards 1975 when [the war] began, the *Tanzīm* was already set up. In parallel, starting in 1973, the Christian parties such as the *Kata’ib*, began to prepare their structure and their men for the combat. (Phalanges former fighter, 22 November 2005)

In the Lebanese war, the boundaries between what is considered as domestic affair and what is considered as international politics, were blurred. Differently from the imaginative geographies of official geopolitics, which depicted the militias as local fanatics, the militias were not sealed off from state power, following no geopolitical logic, but, on the contrary, they were active players in the war who produced representations and practices which were informed by official geopolitics but reflected locally and materially, on the urban built fabric of Beirut, and attributed new meanings to the city. For example, the notoriety of the *Murabitun* leader Ibrahim Kolehlat was directly connected to the neighbourhoods where his supporters were enrolled, as well as to the wider area of West Beirut; these neighbourhoods, in turn, were associated with Pan-Arab socialism and Islam. Kolehlat was defined as “the new Mohammedan leader of whom the star is beginning to shine in the sky of Basta, of Mazraa, and even of

Mousseiythe⁶⁶” (*L’Orient le Jour* 1975a: 4). The urban geopolitics of Beirut were therefore shaped by – rather than developing independently from – official international foreign policy and geopolitical events.

As Yves Lacoste (1983) once argued, state geopolitics is not the only legitimate one; there are also “other” geopolitics, through which the space of international politics can be narrated. “Other” geopolitics are the geographical knowledges and meanings that are excluded from normative representations of global politics, but that are nonetheless interacting with them, first of all through their relation of exclusion. One cannot separate official and unofficial geo-politics in the Lebanese war, or nest them separately in a hierarchy of geographical scales.

The war in Beirut generated architectures of enmity that transcend the sphere of the urban and refer to sites beyond the national borders of Lebanon. A poster produced by the Murabitun militia (Figure 6) depicts an Uncle Sam-looking Moshe Dayan⁶⁷ wearing a stars-and-stripes cylinder hat where the stars are stars of David, the symbol of Judaism as well as Zionism, underneath the Arabic spelling of the Hebrew word *Shalom* (‘peace’ or also used as a greeting). This poster embodies the anti-capitalist (anti-American), anti Zionist stand of the Murabitun, but also of the National Movement, whose parties were defined as politically progressive and supportive of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli regime. The repeatable materiality⁶⁸ of this poster and its multiple geopolitical narratives in West Beirut, shows how official geopolitical discourses and actors were reinterpreted by the militias, and this re-interpretation reflected on the built environment.

⁶⁶ Neighbourhoods of West Beirut.

⁶⁷ IDF chief of staff from 1952 to 1958 and Israeli defence minister from 1968 to 1974.

⁶⁸ See Foucault’s (2002: 114) idea of “repeatable materiality” of a statement explained in Chapter 1.



Figure 6. Al-Mourabitoun propaganda poster. Source: poster no. 154-PCD2081-21 in: "Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's", special collection. Digital Documentation Centre, American University of Beirut.

One example of the reinterpretation of geopolitical scripts and their reframing along the lines of the urban conflict and its built environment is evident in a poster produced by the Lebanese Forces⁶⁹. The poster (Figure 7) is in praise of Ayn al Rummana, the neighbourhood where the conflict first sparked in April 1975 (see Chapter 4), and which had become a stronghold for recruiting young fighters and for the resistance of the Christian militias against the National Movement. The Arabic text at the base of this poster says “all the eyes in the world are shut, while Ayn al Rummana remains vigilant”. The meaning of this line is complemented by the rest of the compositional elements: a heavily shelled (but still standing) multi-storey building is depicted with anthropomorphic features (it has limbs and a face and is also bleeding), wearing army boots, and appears as if running,. In one hand it holds a torch on top of which a flame is burning, which is actually a stylized Arabic word: *Lubnān* (Lebanon). On the side of the torch is another Arabic writing: *al imān* (faith). In the other hand, as if carried against one of its walls, is a map of the nation-state of Lebanon. The cedar tree depicted on the Lebanese flag is present on the map, where we can also read a further Arabic text: *al qadiya al lubnāniyya* (the Lebanese question). While “escaping”, the building is depicted as if it were stepping onto a copious crowd of people armed with spears, from which objects resembling missiles are shooting. The Arabic text under the crowd says *al qiyāl al hamajiyya al ‘arabiyya* (the barbaric Arab tribes).

Numerous geopolitical narratives overlap in this poster: the neighbourhood itself, the role of Lebanon in the Arab world, the international community’s attitude towards the civil war (and the status of Lebanon) and the Lebanese nationalism hostile to pan-Arab integration – expressed using particularly Orientalist and colonizing tones depicting the Arabs as a chaotic warring crowd, labelled as “barbaric tribe”. This is a clear example that illustrates how militia counter-narratives are structured in relation to – and not in isolation from – geopolitical narratives; they are neither developed in a void, nor did the militias passively reproduce mainstream geopolitical scripts. On the contrary, the interplay of official and unofficial geopolitics produced new urban spatialities that contained, renegotiated, and inscribed these geopolitical codes onto the urban built environment.

⁶⁹ A party that, from 1976, reunited all the Christian militias – Kata’ib, “the tigers” of the Ahrar party, the “the giants” (*Marada*), the “guardians of the cedars” and the *Tanzīm*.

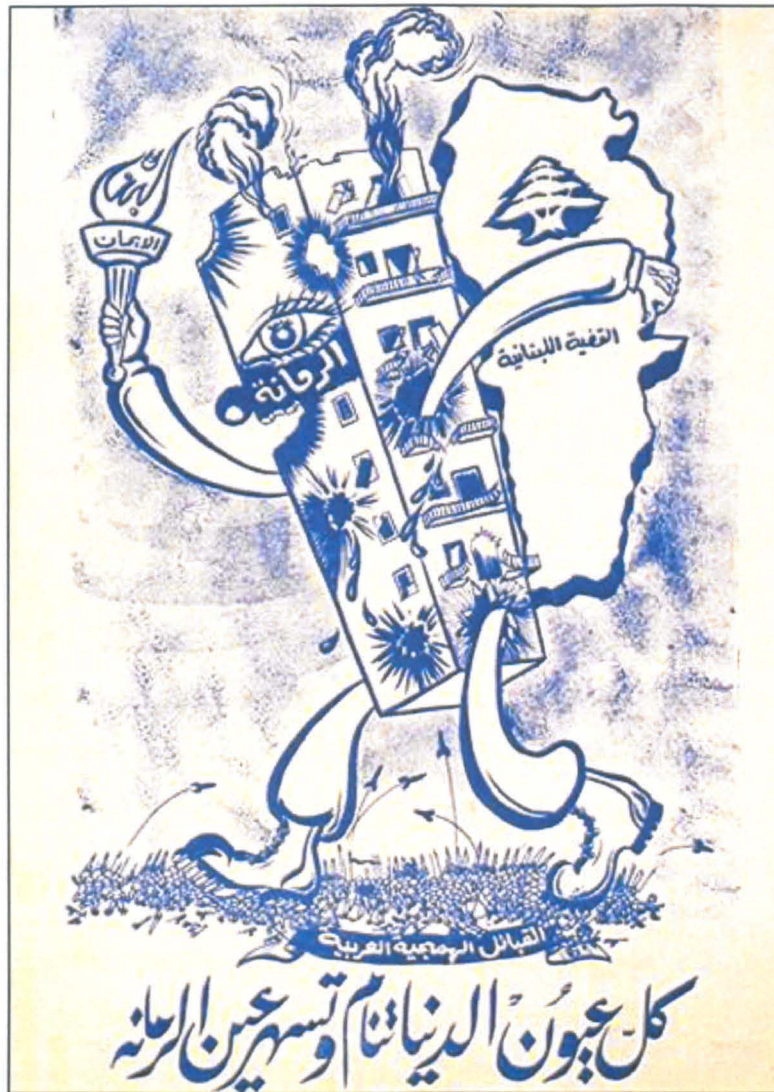


Figure 7. Lebanese Forces propaganda poster. Source: Poster no. 354-PCD2709-06 In Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's, special collection. Digital Documentation Center, American University of Beirut, Beirut.

6.3 Between Form And Representation. Urbicide As Lived Space.

In Chapter 1 I remarked on Isin's interpretation of urban space and the built environment as neither an exclusively material background, nor as a purely abstract project. In his interpretation of the constitution of social relations the city, Isin (2002) describes the material and symbolic spaces necessary (and qualitatively unique) for the formation of specific groups relations as "neither distinct not homologous. Nor can each be read off from the other" (42). In other words, "human beings inhabit two spaces simultaneously" and "groups cannot materialize themselves as real without realising themselves in space, without creating configurations of buildings, patterns, and arrangements, and symbolic representations of these arrangements" (Isin 2002: 42-43). Built forms influence definitions of social groups in the sense that the built space, rather than being an inert background where social relations unfold, is co-creative of these relations: it possesses unique qualities – contained in the social reality that in turn had produced that space – that are one with the performance and representation of social relations tied to it. In this sense, "space is a condition of being political" (Isin 2002: 43).

I will now attempt to employ Isin's view in order to suggest a further aspect of my interpretation of the relationships between political violence and the built environment applied to the war of Beirut. The space that urbicide makes corresponds to what Isin defines as the "battleground *through which*" (2002: 51, emphasis in the original) social relations happen. This means, the space of urbicide is constituted not only by the built environment intended as a mere object standing "in the way" of military calculations, but does not even consist only of pure symbolism superimposed as a label to the built environment. The main feature of urbicide is being at once an object and an idea; a military tactic and a political motivation. We could then say that the spaces of urbicide are fluid because in them material presences and conceptual discourses shape each other. In what follows I will expose those statements where we can remark the coexistence between discourses about a political idea of Beirut and the tactical reasoning about the shape of the built environment that underpinned militia practices.

In the context of the street fight for the stabilization of the frontlines⁷⁰ during the Two Years' War, the role of the built environment was deeply complex. If it is true that a number of different visions about the geo-political shape of Lebanon were informing the fighting, it is also true that careful consideration was given to tactical calculations regarding the presence of Beirut's built space as a factor influencing the fighting. Therefore, an attempt to interpret how urbicide constitutes itself *through* space – rather than *on* it or *for* it – needs to take into empirical consideration the coexistence of visions of urban fighting that emphasize the strategic value of the built form and the influence of the political cause on the reproduction of meanings around it. The coexistence of material or tactical visions of the built environment, with its symbolic and political aspects, reoccurs in the accounts of the fighting and in the discourses in the press of the time. One cannot always make a clear distinction between what was perceived as destruction for military and strategic needs and what was instead considered as destruction for political value. The Barakat building (Figure 8, p. 154) in the proximity of downtown Beirut is a clear illustration of this indistinction.

The Barakat used to be a residential building located along Damascus Road in correspondence with one of the four main road crossings where during the war the main east-west traffic axes used to meet the north-south Green Line. These crossings were also the main entrances to the city for the traffic coming from the south, the north and the east. Some of the buildings at these crossings (such as the National Museum) became check-points where residents of the two sides would queue to enter “the other side” while other crossings were under the control of snipers who – positioned in the surrounding buildings – used to shoot at “everything that moved” in the area (interview with former National Movement fighter 15 November 2005). The Barakat building was also an architectural landmark before the war because Lebanese architect Yusef Aftimus constructed it following an early-modern style considered as avant-garde in the 1930s. Since the first rounds of the war, nevertheless, when the main fire front quickly reached the area where the building stood – just before the entrance to the city centre – the Kata'ib occupied and evicted its residents. The building was transformed at the same time into an ideal sniper position because its architectural composition allowed the sniper to have a clear vision of the surroundings without visibility from the outside. It

⁷⁰ During the Two Years' War the political geography of the city of Beirut changed in a radical manner, giving a semi-definitive spatial shape to the politico-sectarian conflicts of the time: “starting from Spring 1976, the demarcation lines were fixed on a definitive basis in the whole country, and they did not shift anymore” (Corm 2005: 212).

also became an element of the Green Line, as well as part of what became East Beirut. Because of this situation caused by its physical features and location, the building became subject to prolonged cross-fire throughout the war, but especially in its first phases. With its strategic position and architecture particularly suitable to war tactics (e.g. sniper fire), the Barakat building produced unique social practices, both during the war and after it. The building became a check-point, a sniper position, a notorious landmark, and – after the war – an object of heritage conservation⁷¹ as well as a stage for political protest, as we will see in the conclusive chapter. One of the architects currently working on a project for the conservation of the building underlined the fluid co-presence of violent practices – especially the snipers' practices – that rotated through the Barakat building during the Two Years' War. As this person told me (interview with architect, 9 November 2005), it was not only cross-fire (and the misfortune of the position of the building) to make it a target, not only its political meaning (its connection with the Kata'ib) to determine it as a space that needed to be destroyed, but rather it was a combination of numerous variations of both. The attack to the building, mainly the product of snipers shooting from the surrounding buildings, was the product of the war routine of fights and blockades and also of the personal disposition of the individual snipers. This personal disposition did not necessarily and exclusively express hostility, due to political coherence, but was rather tied to more embodied dynamics:

if you hear snipers' stories, they will tell you that they were sitting there waiting for orders to kill. If the order comes to kill, then nothing must pass in that area, not even a cat. This means: this is your time to kill. If he is bored and there is no order to kill, the concrete shell that is facing him, which symbolizes the other side, became the way to release frustration. So many of the snipers would be shooting like we shoot with the dart...you know: 'this is the place where you should add one more hole'. Also, fifteen years of cross-fire are there, but this doesn't mean that every time it was cross-fire; it could have been just people letting out their energy against the other, which could be not necessarily energy against the other: it is energy, full stop. Because it was frustration, or because people didn't know who exactly they were killing. So the building became a symbol of the other, and it became the way to get at the other so if you add one more hole, then you get one more point. (Interview with architect, 9 November 2005)

⁷¹ The Barakat building is currently part of a campaign for its conservation and restoration within the Beirut-based association APSAD which, since the 1960s, has fought to save Lebanon's built heritage. For details, see <http://apsadonline.com/actions.shtml> (page accessed on 14 March 2008).

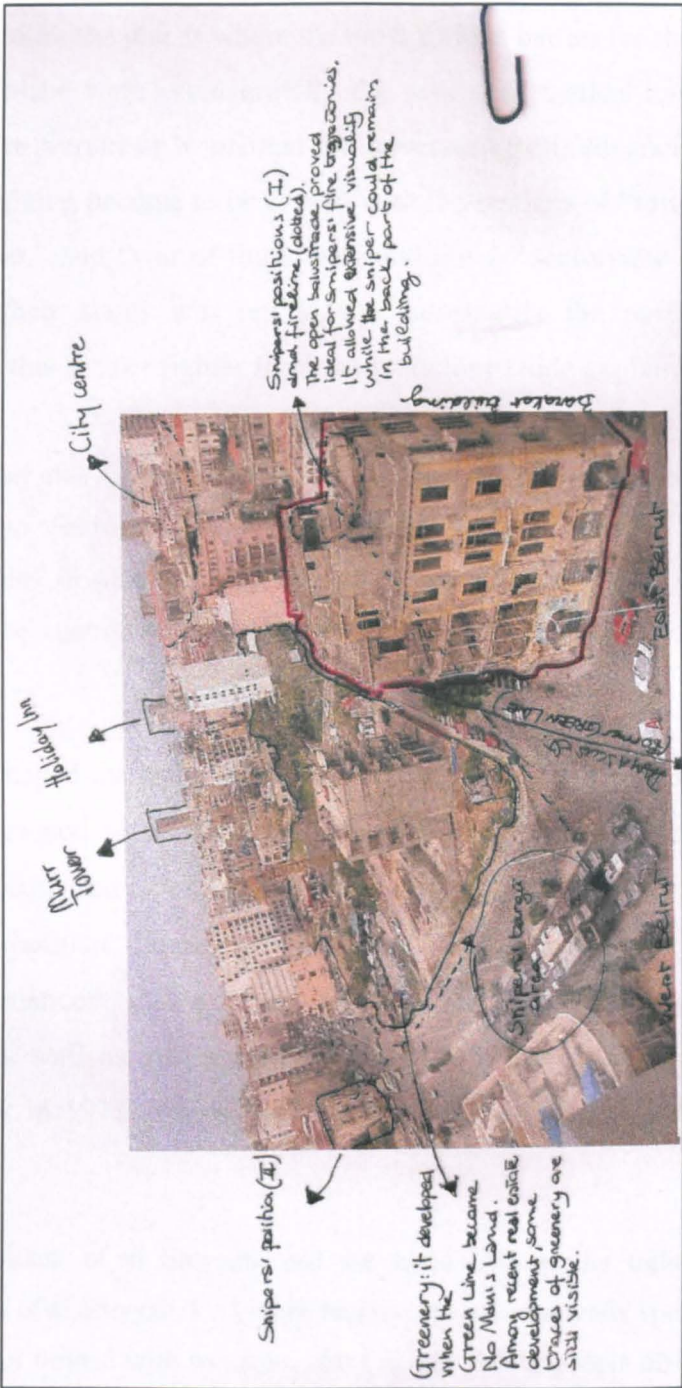


Figure 8. The Barakat building in the context of the Green Line at the Sodeco intersection and the sniper dynamics on the Green Line. Source: photo taken by the author, Beirut, December 2005.

The choices regarding the places where the most furious battles for the possession of the city centre took place were often initially the results of tactical calculations made in order to gain more terrain or to prevent the adversary from advancing. Although later the sites of the fighting became to be known with the epithets of “fortifications”, “Battle of the Holiday Inn,” and “war of the towers and hotels” (interview with journalist, 25 October 2005), their status was not always necessarily the pure fruit of political determination, as this former fighter from the Isolationist side explained:

we cannot say that there was an initial decision to destroy the economy of the country, or to destroy those sites that were considered as being a symbol, or economic poles, or whatever. Initially, it was simply about fighting and that could not always be controlled. (interview with Kata'ib former fighter, 22 November 2005)

Political causes shaped the unfolding of the fighting, but were not all-encompassing or stable. They developed in parallel to the tactical progression of the fighting. As the necessity to defend and maintain control over certain areas increased, people's involvement in political causes extended. A former combatant of the National Movement experienced the gradual intensification of military activity in his neighbourhood as well as the increasing politicization of its inhabitants in the early phases of the war in 1975. The built landscape mirrored and reproduced this political intensification:

I was a resident of al Shiyyah, and the main axis of the fights ... was the surroundings of al Shiyyah. [...] in the beginning I was not really speaking politics. But then I got trained with weapons, and I ... was seeing people discussing, about national issues, social issues, and things like that. In the first period [...] there was a faction, namely the Kata'ib, ... they would carry out attacks against the area, and here the other faction used to counter attack. The least I could do was to protect my house; so I trained with weapons, and I started speaking politics. (interview with National Movement former fighter, Beirut, 1 December 2005)

A former fighter who took part in the battle of the hotels along the seafront in Beirut's city centre exemplified the double presence of political meaning and strategic consideration within apparently similar action, involving the same object. The act of

destroying a lamp inside the hotel is portrayed both as an act that reproduces political power and as a tactical device for defence purposes:

[The fighters] destroy, but if you look at it, what is it against? What does the lamp represent? The lamp represents the state, it represents the structure, the laws, and all that one [combatant] did not achieve [in time of peace]; sometimes I shot against the lamps, because it would make light when we needed to attack, but this is something different. (interview with Kata'ib former fighter, Beirut, 22 November 2005)

This episode constitutes an emblematic example for interpreting urbicide as lived space: the spatiality of deliberate material destruction – rather than being either a purely tactical or a purely political move, emerges instead as a creative, negotiable, open ended practice that is shaped by peculiar combinations of power shaped *through* the built environment.

6.3.1 Between materiality and meaning: the battle of the Holiday Inn.

The current shell-marked skeleton of the Holiday Inn (Figure 9) stands on the western edge of the city centre, on the seafront of the Kantari neighbourhood, among a group of other modern grand hotels all built between the 1930s and the 1970s (Yacoub 2005). It is a multi-storey block that became one of the emblems of Lebanese modernist architecture, and it was designed by French architect Andre Wogensky (one of the principal collaborators of Le Corbusier) together with Lebanese partner Maurice Hindieh. The same team also designed the Ministry of Defence premises, east of Beirut. Between October 1975 and March 1976, the city centre became the focus of the battle for the partition of Beirut, and after the seizing of the Murr Tower by the Murabitun in March 1976, intense fighting broke out between the Murabitun – who were shooting from the strategic height of the close-by Murr tower still under construction – and a Kata'ib division that had barricaded itself in the Holiday Inn. The “battle of the hotels”, from the name of the district in which it was fought, is a crucial moment, in which the city centre was finally divided between rival militias. Specifically, this meant that the main confrontation line (later called the Green Line) – which started from the suburbs of al-Shiyyah and Ayn al Rummana where the war started on 13 April 1975, and gradually

made its way towards the northern neighbourhoods closer to the city centre – was finally sealed once it reached the seafront north of downtown.



Figure 9. The Holiday Inn hotel as it appears today. Most of the shelling marks are on the eastern side of the building (facing the city centre) which is where the militia of the National Movement, from the height of the Murr Tower, were shooting from. This structure has undergone no major change since the end of the war. Source: photo taken by Claudio Minca, Beirut, January 2002.

Kamal Younis, the leader of the Socialist Arab Union militia, who first organized the assault to the Holiday Inn hotel, stated during a press conference that:

the Holiday Inn has fallen “for the safeguard of the Arab belonging of Lebanon” [...] The martyrs have fallen for the “national cause” [...] We affirm once again that Lebanon will remain Arab and that all its children, its institutions, its army and its culture will play their role by serving the Arab causes [...] We are building the Lebanon of the future as all the martyrs that have fallen in the last months wanted it, a democratic Lebanon, where all the citizens will be treated equally, and where social justice will be created especially for the forces of the working classes. [...] The army of Arab Lebanon [is the] image of the Lebanese army of the future, of national and non sectarian Lebanon. (*L’Orient le Jour* 1976b)

On the occasion of the same event, a Murabitun spokesman stated that “the movement was determined to continue the battle. Indeed, the aim of our people is the protection of the Arab identity of Lebanon and the realization of a free, socialist, and united society” (al Nahar 1976:3).

The battle of the hotels is one of the episodes of the Two Years’ War where the spatiality of the conflict particularly showed the blend of representation and material considerations and the processes through which they shaped the lived spaces of urbicide. When the battle came to an end with the fall of the Holiday Inn hotel in the hands of the National Movement on 23 March 1976, a spokesperson for the Murabitun militia – which played a major role in the operation – defined the battle to conquer the Holiday Inn as one “that has an aim which is at once military and political” (*L’Orient le Jour* 1976c: 4). What produced this blend between the strategic and the political – a mix that is particularly palpable in the media discourses and in the witnesses’ accounts – were the unique and complex spatial practices populating the hotel area, before and during the war, as a Lebanese architect working in Beirut explained to me in an interview:

this hotel [...] was the only hotel that was taken into charge by the Christian militias, and they transformed it in a fortress, starting from which they could dominate all West Beirut. So there had been alliances between the Syrians and the Palestinians and the Lebanese militias to attack the hotel, which was the symbol of all this old Beirut that they did not want anymore [...] in all this, there was a kind

of myth that West Beirut wanted to destroy: a Beirut where they were the poor and the others were the rich. (architect, 28 October 2005)

Class considerations were not the only ones to determine the divide between the Holiday Inn contenders. Besides the awareness of the identification of this modernist neighbourhood with an urban idea based on international market, one must also take into consideration the sectarian factor, which often not only overlapped but bypassed class and became the main discourse within which the conquest of the Holiday Inn acquired sense. The following is the account of a former member of the Isolationist militia; he explains how, class considerations notwithstanding, sectarian belonging served as main parameter to rationalize his vision of the exigency to conquer the hotel:

[the hotel area] was a new Lebanon that was for the rich, not for us. Despite this, every time that a tower fell in the hands of our enemy, we – the Christians of the Eastern part of Beirut – felt that they were approaching, that they wanted to kill us, that they are now closer to us. (Phalanges former fighter, 31 October 2005)

The sectarian reference is instead kept aside, and the class vision emphasized, in this account from a former combatant who belonged to the forces reunited in the National Movement; he too participated in the hotel battle. Asked about how he felt while fighting among the hotels, he observed that

the battle of the hotels was fundamental because it would complete the [Green] Line, as it had yet remained uncompleted. [...] Before the war, the best cinema was the Saint Charles, and we used to attend it; but we used to do that seeing it in an anti-class logic [...], as this cinema was in fact the celebration of the capitalist system. During the war, this symbolism was also joined by the value of the Holiday Inn as a fortification whose seizing was important to hit the moral of the enemy. The moral defeat was on two sides: on the moral of the enemy and on the capitalist, bourgeois system which we associated with the opposing part. (National Movement former fighter, 15 November 2005)

The battle for the centre of Beirut was informed both by military necessities and by political visions. Rather than being pre-constituted and suddenly starting to clash, these visions of military position, military morale, and – even before the war – considerations about social class; religious sect, etc. were produced through the everyday practice of war and the material spaces in which it was waged. We can thus say that this part of

Beirut endured urbicide because its material fabric and the combination of meanings that it embodied was reworked by the city's militia who "disputed the city between themselves" (*L'Orient le Jour* 1975b: 1) and negotiated their differences in relation with and within the material fabric.

The blend between tactic and motivation produced new spatialities that continued to reproduce meanings and practices after the battle came to an end. A number of press conferences, communiqués, and propaganda posters were released by the National Movement in the following days, months and even years, making the crucial battle of the hotels – and especially of the Holiday Inn – an object for celebration, commemoration and political cause that remained emblematic throughout the war. A statement to the press by a Murabitun militia spokesperson just after the fall of the Holiday Inn exemplifies the co-presence of military and political considerations in the targeting of the built fabric. After describing the battle that lasted about six months and closed the Green Line, as it was conceived as an operation aimed at cleansing the Western part of Beirut from the Isolationists, the spokesperson continued to report the other 'conquests' in favour of the National Movement. This time it was a representative building rather than a mundane one – namely, an army officers' club on the seafront – to be seized after the conquest of the hotels. But besides having a strategic value in order to free West Beirut from the last Kata'ib stronghold, the attack to the Holiday Inn came to embody also a message about the political virtue of the National Movement and of the space that came under its control, as contrasted to the lack of these virtues by the other side:

the joint national forces have cleansed the last isolationist pocket that had been surrounded in the building of Saint Charles⁷². Analogously, the Murabitun have occupied the officers' club. Therefore, the whole region has been freed and from now it will live in peace (*L'Orient le Jour* 1976c: 4).

The repeatable materiality of the discourse about the liberation of West Beirut by the isolationist forces through the seizing of the Holiday Inn can be tracked down by analysing the political meanings conveyed by the composition of a series of propaganda posters issued by the Arab Socialist Union in Lebanon and by the Murabitun. The first poster (Figure 10, below) was designed for the Arab Socialist Union in Lebanon and it

⁷² Other name for the Holiday Inn building complex.

commemorates the fifth anniversary of the party's foundation; its visuality is imbued with revolutionary and Pan-Arab (represented by the Egyptian flag) narratives. In the left background one can recognize the burning Holiday Inn building. The poster displays one of Jamal Abd el Nasser's famous phrases:

indeed our people are determined to celebrate the work of their life on their land through freedom and truth, through equality and righteousness, through love and peace.

In this poster, the use of Pan-Arab geopolitical narratives is directly linked to the reinterpretation of the material built environment: the affirmation of Panarab ideals in West Beirut through the control by the National Movement militias, is directly linked to the materiality of the Holiday Inn building and the meanings attached to its attack.

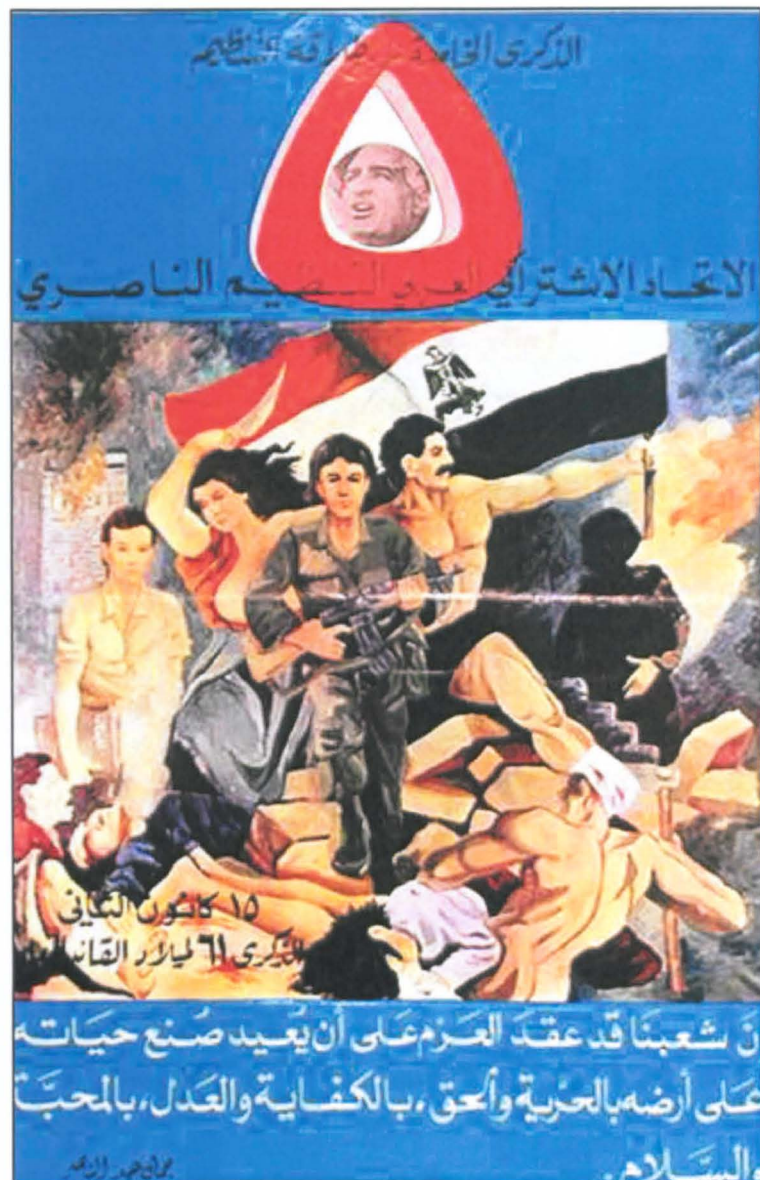


Figure 10. Arab Socialist Union in Lebanon propaganda poster. Source: Poster nr.167-PCD0459-01 In Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's, special collection. Digital Documentation Center, American University of Beirut, Beirut.

The second example regards two posters released by the Murabitun (Figures 11 and 12, below). The first poster (Figure 11) commemorates the martyrs fallen in the attempt to conquest the Holiday Inn; the second one (Figure 12) was released in 1977 for the first anniversary of the hotel battle. Both posters report Murabitun leader Ibrahim Koleilat's statement at the end of the battle: "on 21 March 1976, the Murabitun crashed the symbol of the fascist treachery, and swore that they will continue the fight whatever its price is". The Holiday Inn has become, in the representations of its assault produced by the National Movement, "the symbol of the fascist treachery". Fascist – in this perspective – are the isolationist militias⁷³. They had been considered treacherous by the National Movement because of their isolation and their refusal to take into consideration the Arab identity of Lebanon.

The materiality of the building and its repeated representation in the poster, are directly linked to the strategic aspects of the battle of the hotels in March 1976, but also, the Holiday Inn acquires a repeatable materiality which allows it to become a recognizable mark throughout Beirut, as the depiction of its built material structure also conveys meanings of contested power in the city.

⁷³ The Nazi-fascist inspiration of the Lebanese phalanges is commonly acknowledged, although the references to Hitler, Mussolini or Franco are not explicit. According to an interview held by Beirut-based journalist Robert Fisk, Pierre Gemayel attended the 1936 Berlin Olympic games as President of the Lebanese football federation, and praised the discipline in German society in the early years of the Third Reich, but without ever naming Hitler, and underlining that the word Nazism at the time did not mean the atrocities that we nowadays know. He pledged to export that discipline to Lebanon and upon his return he created the youth movement of the Lebanese Phalanges (Kataib).

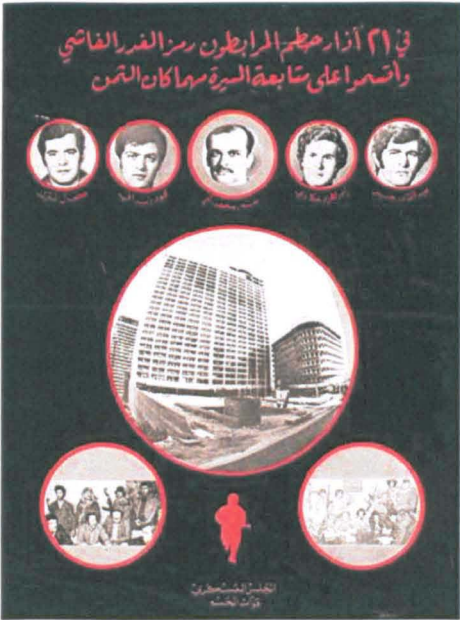


Figure 11 Al-Murabitun propaganda poster. Source: Poster nr.158-PCD2081-17. In Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's, special collection. Digital Documentation Centre, American University of Beirut, Beirut.

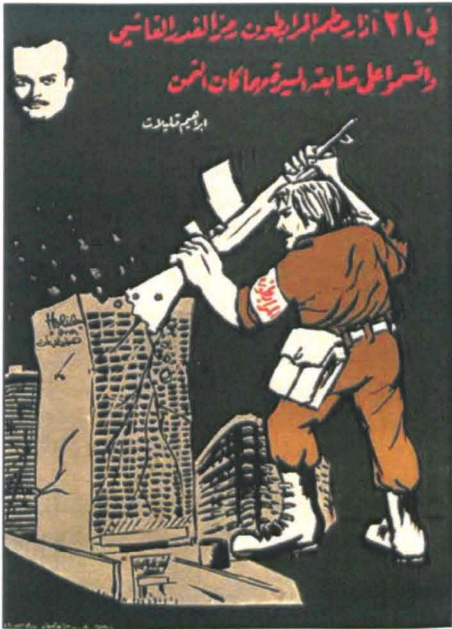


Figure 12. Al-Murabitun propaganda poster. Source: poster nr. 159-PCD2081-16. In Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's, special collection. Digital Documentation Centre, American University of Beirut, Beirut.

Firstly, the perspective from which the hotel building is depicted is the same in both posters (Figures 11 and 12), and it represents the side of the hotel facing uphill towards the part of the city centre where the National Movement militias were positioned. This is a remarkable fact as it is from here that it was first attacked, and this also explains the pattern of bullet scars on the façade. The crucial tactical manoeuvre that allowed the National Movement militias to break into the building by blowing up the wall separating the hotel from the rear street and the contiguous Phoenicia hotel can be tracked down to the action of one man, the explosive expert Ahmad Jibril, the living leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC).

As the Murabitun could not execute this plan by themselves and capture the hotel, they decided to do the job under the leadership of Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC. Jibril was an expert in explosives. He and his men blew up a wall that separates the Holiday Inn from the Phoenicia and from this open wall the combatants – the majority was Palestinian – entered in the Holiday Inn and the Lebanese Forces – the Phalanges – began to leave the place (journalist, 25 October 2005).

This aspect is relevant in interpreting the discourses about power that this battle produced. This manoeuvre procured Ahmad Jibril the attention of the media: several press conferences followed, where the National Movement's spokesmen released their declarations. Through this event, the power of the militias of the National Front could be communicated, through the media nationwide and turned the battle into a symbolic and spectacular event in the accounts about the war in the foreign press. The pictures in the lower part of the first poster illustrate this process of spectacularisation as they depict the images that the fighters took for the press at the end of the battle and during the press conference held by Ibrahim Kolehlat. As a journalist who covered the battle in 1976 told me, Ahmad Jibril carefully planned the way:

It was [...] about midnight and his [militia representatives] phoned me and asked me if I can send a photographer [...] I sent him a photographer and [Ahmad Jibril] insisted to have the copies of the pictures before they got published. [...] He smartly considered that passing these pictures through the newspapers meant to give everybody the proof to the whole world that it was Ahmad Jibril that had destroyed the hotels. (journalist, 25 October 2005)

The second poster (Figure 12) reports the same statement made by Ibrahim Koleilat (who is also portrayed in the upper left corner) that is on the first poster (Figure 11). Here, the simultaneous presence of tactical prevailing and of political assertion is more obvious than on the first poster. The logic of urbicide as a process of material and discursive re-definition of spatial discourses is illustrated in the drawing of a Murabitun fighter smashing a reduced size Holiday Inn with his rifle. As we observed before, urban destruction in Beirut did not happen in a void; neither did it end in the very act of destruction. Rather, it has been a process of cancellation and redefinition of existent spatial orders and of consequent assertion of further configurations. The Murabitun fighters defeated the Isolationist militias by evicting them from the Holiday Inn. Through this act, not only did the Murabitun – and the wider National Movement – strike a tactical victory, but they also positioned their own political identity – and consequently the one of their adversaries – in the space of Beirut, by sealing the presence and position of the main fire line, the Green Line. In other words, the militias – through the assault, loss or conquest of the Holiday Inn – repositioned their military presence, re-stated their political views in a higher style (especially the Murabitun) and (above all) located these views in a clearly defined territory in the city.

The phrase quoted in these two posters has been reproduced many times in the form of graffiti on the walls of wartime West Beirut (Chaktoura 2005). What is remarkable about the repeatable materiality of these statements is the fact that these posters populated the city for a long time after March 1976 and into the year-long truce after the entry of the Arab deterrence force in Beirut in 1977. The urban militias produced their own discourses about power and its specialisation, but these discourses developed independently from ongoing official state discourses about reconciliation. A new culture of war and confrontation had taken shape *in and through* the city, contributing to and being nourished by the stabilization of the main military and political fronts within the city for the duration of the Two Years' War.

6.3.2 The everyday built environment as weapon

During the Two Years' War not only symbolic or government buildings were affected, but also common and everyday buildings came under insistent attacks. Coward (2002), Graham (2003) and Weizman (2003; 2004; 2007) have analysed the implications, at

once political and military, of the violence against the built environment of everyday life in Bosnia, in the Palestinian occupied territories and in Israel, respectively. Coward has remarked that the destruction of the totality of the urban built fabric where a community lives, and not only of its symbols, implies the attempt to eliminate the relations between space and community born out of heterogeneity⁷⁴. Graham has considered the capillary destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure by the IDF – houses, roads and even office equipment of the Palestinian National Authority – as an attempt to eradicate the basis of any concrete existence of the Palestinian people. Weizman has extensively analysed the everyday implications between planners, soldiers and settlers along the past 50 years of Israeli history. These investigations can help us better understand the destruction of everyday space in Beirut at this time

From the very first rounds of the war in Beirut in April 1975, a wide portion of the urban built fabric was affected by the fighting: the most immediate and extensive change – especially in the southern suburbs of al Shiyya and Ayn al Rummana and surrounding areas – consisted of checkpoints and road diversions that could be either permanent or mobile. Furthermore, road bombs and car bombs hit central and peripheral areas and affected various kinds of buildings, such as patrol stations, schools, the port and cinemas as well as private houses. During “the battle of Beirut” (*L'Orient le Jour* 1975c: 1), the reconfiguration of the urban territory through the creation and stabilization of the Green Line, highly symbolic and institutional buildings (such as the parliament building), as well as informal ones (such as shops and libraries), were heavily involved. The press described on many occasions the damage inflicted onto the informal and non-governmental built fabric just after the increasing of the hostilities in the city centre of Beirut:

On Paris Avenue, five passengers in a car rolling at high speed opened fire with their machine guns against an automobile exhibition hall belonging to Michel Mitri Anid. Numerous among the exhibited cars have been hit by the bullets. [...] The fire has reduced into ruins the Librairie du Liban and the headquarters of the Al Itimad bank, [...] as well as a part of the PanAm building. (*L'Orient le Jour* 1975c: 1)

Army detachments were deployed to protect official landmarks such as the parliament building and the annexed square, Place de l'Etoile (*L'Orient le Jour* 9 Dec 1975), but

⁷⁴ The productive coexistence in agonistic difference.

eventually the militias entered and looted the parliament and in March 1976 the building hosting the Council of Ministers (the *Grand Sérail*) was also shelled and occupied by the Phalanges militias as part of the battle for the conquest of the city centre for the stabilization of the frontline in the Spring of 1976:

we carried out raids against the Sérail, a Phalanges spokesman specified, who has indicated that these forces did not occupy the block of buildings on a permanent basis (*L'Orient le Jour* 1976d).

In December 1975, most of the city centre lay in ruins, with the exception of the bank sector which was repeatedly protected by the Lebanese army; a Lebanese architect noticed that

what is astonishing is that the bank street has not even been touched. [...] All the banks have remained undamaged. Only the British Bank has been robbed of its contents by the communist party⁷⁵, because they needed money. It is the only bank that a party has been allowed to rob because they needed all the equipment to wage war. (architect, 28 October 2005)

By March 1976, the grand hotels of the seafront had endured a six month battle for the stabilization of the last stretch of the Green Line and the consequent final division of the city into two sectors:

Beirut became a unique line of fire [...] it started in Kantari until it reached the Holiday Inn and the Starco building where the confrontation line was completed [...] and it became a stable line. (National Movement former fighter, 15 November 2005).

The Holiday Inn hotel, populating the pre-war everyday life of the young fighters to be, had now become both a strategic position and a political symbol. Its spatiality is well described in the words describing the looting of the hotel used by one of the press reporters that was covering the events just after what the press named the “fall of the Holiday Inn”:

they began to empty the Holiday Inn of everything but the concrete: the tiling, the sanitary furniture, everything that was inside and wasn't wall. [...] carpets, mini-

⁷⁵ The Lebanese Communist Party had a 3000-members militia called the Popular Guard, led by late Communist Party secretary George Hawi.

bars, pieces of furniture and so on. They left nothing. The same thing had been repeated again at the Phoenicia⁷⁶. (journalist, 25 October 2005)

The concrete shell of the city, its official as well as its informal buildings, came under attack in the process of redefinition of the city's lived spaces. This was done not simply by acting on the urban built space as if it was merely a background or a passive concrete shell (as implied by those who prioritize the thesis of military calculation or human survival), but rather by enacting political visions and making them happen *through* the built space and by using that built space as an active part of the process and as capable of reproducing new meanings and practices (as we have seen in the case of the Holiday Inn). The space of urbicide is a lived space as it is always already produced by contingent and located relations and as it reproduces new ones in its turn.

As Stephen Graham (2004) has argued, there is only a thin line between projecting construction and perpetrating destruction, as both are carefully planned and both imply deep transformations in the urban geo-graph. This thin line also becomes often even finer if we notice how several buildings that were turned into the main landmarks of the battle for the city centre were still unfinished when the militia attacked them: the Holiday Inn (also called the Saint Charles complex, including a cinema) had, for example, only been finished in 1974 and was still amidst controversies regarding its aesthetics, its social meanings and its impact on the urban environment (al Hawadess). The following picture of the Murr Tower (*Burj al Murr*) in the vicinity of the Holiday Inn (Figure 13) depicts it as it was being shelled by the Isolationist militias, a crane still standing in the construction site around it. The skeleton of the tower, then, is not the result of the fight but rather the raw concrete structure still to be completed with cladding and façade elements.

⁷⁶ Hotel Phoenicia was part of the hotel district in the Kantari neighbourhood on the western side of the city centre. It stands next to the Holiday Inn.



Figure 13. The Murr Tower, at the same time under construction and under attack in 1976. Source: www.wanabka.net.

As these spatialities were being reworked by political violence, the built forms became at once the tool *and* the product of these particular practices of war, and the lived spaces of urbicide were enacted not onto but *through* the city's buildings, transforming their peacetime functions and appearance into tools for warfare:

when the Palestinians and the Murabitun decided to seize the Holiday Inn [...] they were shooting bullets systematically against the hotel, floor by floor. While bombing one of the floors, it went up in fire and as the hotel was equipped with some sort of automatic fire alarm, the fire activated it and the water helped to put off the fire [...] and so it was the water and this electronic system that was specifically made for the customers first of all, through which the hotel tries to defend itself against the warrior. (journalist, 25 October 2005)

Standing on the thin line between planned construction and planned destruction, some of Beirut's built forms stood in a blurred realm between peaceful daily use of the buildings and their transformation into weapons of war. Beirut became an indistinct terrain where fortresses could be confused with building sites, and where we can see – as a local architect put it – “the overlap between a clever architect and a clever sniper” (architect, 9 November 2005).

6.4 The Modern Spaces Of Urbicide And Lebanon's Colonial Past

I want to close this chapter by linking political violence and the role of the built environment in the war of Beirut with Lebanon's modern colonial history. From this post-colonial perspective, the built environment of Beirut appears as not only the fruit of the overlap between official and unofficial geopolitics, but also as the result of intertwined histories of the colonial discourse of the sect and its violent re-enactment during the civil war.

European colonial power sowed its own resistance both ideologically and materially “*within* the organizational terrain of the colonial state, rather than in some wholly exterior social space” (Mitchell 1991: xi). Anti-colonial movements are often born inside the colonial institutions (schools, army barracks, buildings) and use colonial

modern devices (maps, military training, modern education, and so on) to prepare, stage, declare, and often establish their presence (Mitchell 1991: xi).

The militias in Beirut employed cartographic logic to redefine the urban space. Late Communist party secretary and leader of the Popular Guard militia George Hawi, declared in a recent videotape that the Green Line was born simply with a tract of red pen on a plan of Beirut: "So, I took a pen and drew a line on the map, all the way from the Martyrs' Square to the port" (al Issawi 2001). This decision came when the National Movement decided to evict the Isolationists from their remaining strongholds in the downtown area. During the battles in central Beirut in 1975 the Kata'ib, for example, with cartographic rationale, created numbered "sectors" (*Qitā'*) that corresponded to various portions of the city centre. Visuality was one of the most important aspects taken into consideration in the tactical moves of the militia, such as domination of the highest towers on the seafront. Domination of high places is certainly not a characteristic specific only of modern wars; however, the way to know, represent and use space in the urban war in Beirut owes much to the modern and cartographic vision of the world as a map which "transform[s] in obstacle or advantage every tract of the face of the earth" (Farinelli 2003: 131) as indicated by the same author, paraphrasing von Clausewitz, in the opening quote of this thesis. The (violent) mechanism implicit in cartographic representation, as we previously saw, consists, according to Farinelli, of 'stiffening' the flow of reality in a representation: the map. Building on this idea, Farinelli defines the "graphic prejudice" as the attitude of those who are "happy enough to identity a formal similarity when they confront, on the only basis of cartographic signs, things that have nothing in common from the point of view of their nature" (130). In other words, with cartographic representation, complex and flowing social relations (for example, the genealogical geographies of late Ottoman Lebanon) are represented on the map and substituted by signs and objects (the sectarian mapping, the population count, the lieutenantancy boundary and so on) which stand *for* social relations and identities, but are believed *to be* exactly the same as the signs on the map. Thus, while contemplating and controlling Beirut from the height of a tower building, the militiaman re-produces the tactical device of the dominance of heights, but this time the device has a load that owes much to the modern significance that visuality, perspective and territory have for representing terrain strategically and for creating representations that frame reality and take its place. Looking down at Beirut, a city divided in sectors in the name of an orderly panorama of 'historical' sects – a representation made real – the

gaze of the militiaman is not only tactical, but also taxonomic. It reproduces the sectarian truth and reifies it through the geometric representation of the built environment. East and West Beirut, for example, are the ultimate product of this territorial reorganization, and at the same time they become the tool to represent this order cartographically and normalise it. People would, for example, refer to East Beirut or West Beirut even when referring to events happening before the birth of that demarcation or after the war was over.

The militias used their contacts within the government to gain more articulated territorial knowledge about the city, as well as for training the members to the use of new, more sophisticated weaponry and knowledge resources (such as maps) on which the State had no more monopoly, among which were – I was told – military maps of the city and its buildings, which would facilitate and inform the urban guerrilla operations:

We did not get directly any military maps. We had some individuals who were with us [...] or associated with us, they were present in the ministries. I remember that we had a comrade in the ministry of public works [...]. So [we used] as much as we could take from governmental institutions through people that we are associated with. (National Movement former fighter II, 1 December 2005)

Once the rounds continued and became regular, the militias used the resources of the state to structure their movements and operations:

In the first phase, we did not have maps with us. It was done in a primitive way. Initially, there is action and reaction, they used to shoot from the East and we used to shoot back to a certain extent. [...] But when the war later spread, there began to be movement (*tana`ulāt*) and we started other battles (*ma`āriq*) and we were asked about the movements. Even the movements were primitive, I remember that the militia I was in did not have the logistics or the equipment; I remember moving in private cars. Whereas in areas like al Shiyyah we moved in a normal way, that is to say walking. Regarding the maps, now that came in the later phases. The war developed and we started using maps. For example in the 1975, in the harb al sanatayn, I was involved 10 military rounds (*dawra 'askariyya*); in the first phases it was through primitive means, so they dismantled guns and stuff like that. And then we were trained as lieutenants. Now in the later phases of the war, around a year later, we started using maps and other engineering equipment (National Movement former fighter I, 1 December 2005).

The militias re-drew the space of Beirut using technologies proper to a state government: they collected taxes, structured their disciplinary system (also prisons, especially in the isolationist militias), policing the neighbourhoods, enrolling new combatants, and even organizing local garbage collection (Harik 1994). The regularization of the militias – including the economic one – happened on every side, as the urban frontlines became more and more stable. A witnessing by a Kata'ib fighter opened this chapter, telling about the structuring of the Isolationist militia economy and organization. What follows is the account of a former National Movement fighter explaining the gradual structuring of its militias:

I quit my business, and I was completely dedicated to the military activities. [...] In the first six or seven months we were paying monthly membership, to provide for ourselves and for the groups. We used to go around all the guys to make sure that they pay. Then [...] there began to be financing for us: the resistance supported us, the Arab countries supported us and everybody financed, and then came something called Haraka al Wataniyya, there was support for the Haraka al Wataniyya so [...] I started to be paid an allowance. (National Movement former fighter II, 1 December 2005)

Finally, the sect was the main structure of those architectures of enmity that represented rival sects and their geopolitical visions as dangerously other and underpinned the actions against the city and its built environment.

The following poster (Figure 14) was produced by the National Movement. The bottom writing recites “self-security”. There are six names written in white in the background: Tall el Zatar, Karantina, Maslakh, Jisr el Basha, Nabaa, and Burj Hammoud. These indicate the Palestinian camps and informal settlements (in which also Kurdish and Armenians resided, especially in Karantina and Burj Hammoud) that were put under siege and cleansed by the right-wing forces in the first phases of the civil war in order to ‘purify’ East Beirut of the elements (human and built) that were considered as harmful for their security. The postcolonial perspective constitutes a terrain from which we can reinterpret the Lebanese civil war biopolitically, going beyond any structural analysis of scale, and also beyond any analysis based on sociological notions of sectarian cultural identity.

The Palestinian camps were considered as having strategically encircled the Christian-dominated part of Beirut: as a former Kata'ib combatant explained, "they [the Palestinians] built camps around Beirut and more precisely around East Beirut". "East Beirut" is a territorial concept which, in this statement, is radically separated from its politically produced spatiality. It is a representation and the reification of a spatial discourse of hostility that now appears as external and pre-existent to the social process, and specifically to the war itself. Here, the idea of "East Beirut" loses all its politically contested features and its embeddedness in the battles of the war, and acquires instead an eternal and pre-existent character, as if there was an East Beirut existing prior to the war. This territorial idea also shaped new politics of identity, notably the production of the Palestinians as the ultimate enemy.

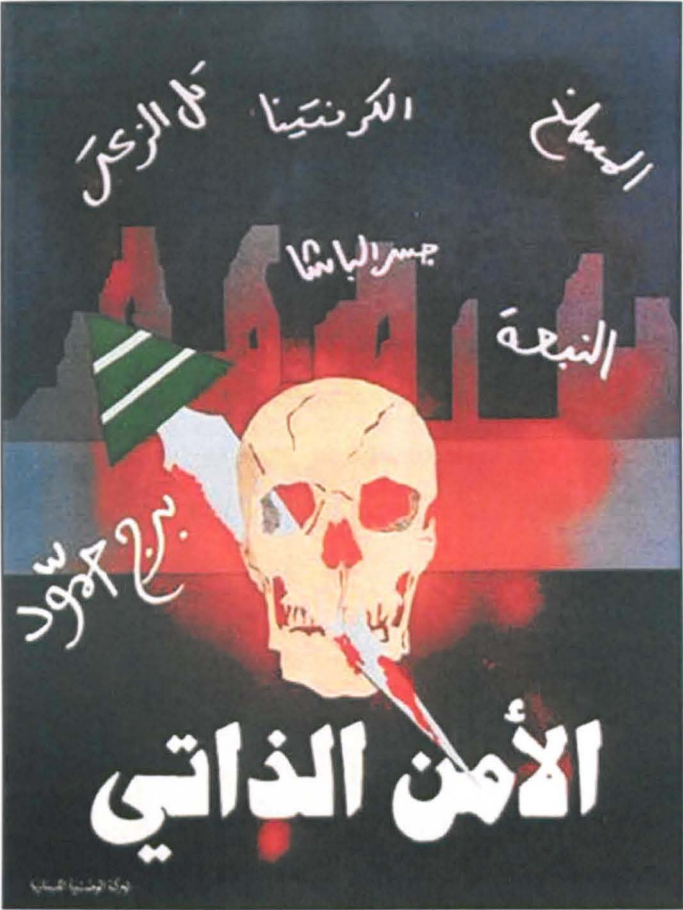


Figure 14. National Movement propaganda poster. Source: Poster nr. 149-PCD2081-09. In Political Posters from the 60's through the 80's, special collection. Digital Documentation Center, American University of Beirut, Beirut.

6.5 Conclusion

Investigating the multiple geopolitics of the Two Years' War has meant exploring that boundary zone between what is said and that is unsaid in geopolitics, and highlighting their contested connections. This brings us back to the ontological implications of the Bush/Blair 'informal' geopolitical disquisition during the G8 in Saint Petersburg, discussed in Chapter 1, and the contested nature of what constitutes 'objectivity' in geopolitics.

This chapter constitutes the second part of my genealogical reading of the geopolitical discourse of the Lebanese civil war and has set out alternative ways to envision the war. It also analysed some specific aspects of the interactions between urban space and political violence, leading my critique to the idea of "urbicide" and opening further interrogatives, which I will outline in the concluding chapter.

Practices of urban fighting in Beirut were not shaped in isolation from the apparatus of the state: indeed, they used their own material devices (such a military maps) in order to remap Beirut through categorisations that carry a colonial legacy and – moreover – carry all the implicit violence of cartographic representation which reduces complex social relations to immutable territorial truths on a map. Ayn al Rummana, the Barakat building or the Holiday Inn, far from merely being concrete structures favouring or contrasting the action of the militias, also embodied discourses that could not have been enacted but through those specific spaces. We could conclude, therefore, that the attack to urban forms always involves the coexistence of tactical utility and political motivation.

As seen in in the Introduction to this work, urbicide has recently been used as a code for measuring the extension and intensity of violence against architecture and to potentially punish the perpetrators through the institution of new legal categories for crimes against architecture (Millard 2004). Such considerations surely have valid potential for policy implementation, nevertheless, I believe that it is also important to consider urbicide as a qualitative theoretical and methodological device, rather than as a technical legal category, in order to highlight the importance of the material specification of

phenomena of urban destruction and at the same time to understand the discourses and practices working behind these phenomena.

Hence, by analysing the multi-sited geopolitics of the destruction of the built environment in Beirut, we can eventually disentangle the idea of urbicide from both the narratives of urbicide as a post-Cold War novelty and as an urban destiny as I analysed in the beginning. We can, therefore, focus instead on the simultaneously material and discursive agendas that political violence against the built environment involves.

Conclusions. Being Geopolitical In Beirut

I think it is high time to rejoin Said's struggle over geography, not least by fostering imaginative counter-geographies that can resist the deadly embrace between "targets" and "civilians", that underwrite a vigilant politics of witnessing, that join affect with analysis, that work towards a geography dedicated to peace.

(Gregory 2006a: 104)

With this thesis, I explored the relationships between political violence, urban geopolitics and the material built environment in Beirut between 1975 and 1976. Different kinds and combinations of official and unofficial geopolitical knowledges, which referred to multi-scalar and multi-sited architectures of enmity, reflected on and were reinforced by the material built environment, so that even the smallest portion of territory would acquire complex and contested ideological and strategic meanings. These meanings were overlooked, dismissed or simply ignored by formal geopolitics, which, on these assumptions, justified the non-intervention policy of the first two years of war.

This study resulted in at least three main strands of content which derive from the research questions posed at the beginning. I asked how the official and unofficial geopolitical representations of the Lebanese war related to each other and what role the built environment of Beirut played in this interaction. These strands include: firstly, the relationship between official and unofficial geopolitical narratives and the politics of their representation; secondly, the relationship between these narratives, human agency and the material built environment; and finally, the last strand resulted from the critical historical approach I took in Chapter 3 and 4 on political violence in modern Lebanon, which revealed the connections existing between modern territoriality, the politics of sectarianism and contemporary political violence. This strand highlights how these connections were reproduced in official and unofficial narratives of political violence in 1975 and 1976. I will now proceed to resume the main features and implications of these three key points.

The Official and Unofficial Geopolitics of Beirut

Drawing from the post-structural theoretical and methodological approaches of critical geopolitics, I explored the discourses about Lebanon in the official foreign policy agendas of a number of state governments. The research investigated these discourses side by side with the geopolitical meanings that were reproduced in the practices of guerrilla street warfare in Beirut.

By means of this contrapuntal analysis of the official and unofficial geopolitical cultures of the Lebanese war, this study aimed at reading beyond the nation-state centred perspective of foreign policy – the “territorial trap” (Agnew 1998) – and questioning the absences that these discourses implied. One example of these absences is the lack of detailed consideration of the militias and their production of geopolitical meanings in Beirut and of the impact of these meanings on the redefinition the space of Beirut. Through these contrapuntal explorations, I have sought to unsettle the structure of scientific certainty in the official geopolitical representations of Lebanon by integrating commonsense dominant discourses to the non-commonsense knowledges of the urban militias in order to highlight the partiality and constructed character of those official representations, but also to show how hegemonic and unofficial knowledges were reciprocally shaped through the materiality of the urban fabric of Beirut. The relationship between dominant and subjugated knowledges discussed by Foucault appears therefore – in the case of the Lebanese civil war – to be nuanced and contextual rather than a fixed dialectic between already determined actors. Militia knowledge and practices, seen from the context of everyday urban life during the war had, in fact, a crucial and very visible impact both on the material and on the discursive layout of the city, which makes it problematical to consider them as subjugated.

On the fighting lines that ignited across the suburbs and the historic centre of Beirut in the first two years of the civil war, the irregular militias disputed, renamed, repopulated and effaced various portions of the city. They fought with increasingly heavy weaponry that they were trained to master, sometimes by state actors such as former army generals and government functionaries. The militia organization became increasingly structured, their geographical and technical knowledge improved and the material imprint of their activities became extensively visible. But the militias did not operate in a space exclusively composed of material objects; they also produced geopolitical narratives about the nation state, power and territory, and these narratives translated into the

physical urban fabric. The militias, in other words, enacted specific practices and discourses that daily reproduced ideas about Lebanon, Beirut, and their role in the world. The urban material fabric was a constitutive part of the production of these geopolitical meanings, and it also bore their material consequences. Those same militias, however, were depicted in the official statements of governments in Europe, the U.S. and Israel, and in the Vatican, as irrational and irresponsible forces who had caused Lebanon to deviate from its tradition of national unity in the name of coexistence and in religious tolerance, and that – because of their own particular feuds – plunged the country into an unintelligible chaos. The militias, in this case, were described as forces outside politics, belonging to an exterior realm of the illogical.

But as we have seen, the militias were not external to politics; on the contrary, they changed the physical and social space of the city, and the built space shaped their practices in return. For example, the division of East and West Beirut was an immanent phenomenon to the practices of the militias and not an a-priori cleavage born from an unmediated translation of identity into territory. In return, the new zones of control that they created required a new set of activities: youth training, defence of the population, provision of the most basic services, such as water, gas, electricity and even refuse collection; these were all shaped by the reformulation of the urban space after the eclipse of state politics.

The militias had control of Beirut between 1975 and 1991 and – although their voices were not considered as legitimate in the eye of international relations – at the street level theirs had become the hegemonic visions of territory, identity and geopolitics in the city. When the first elected post-war government ordered the lifting of every checkpoint and the dismantling of every barricade in 1991, the militias were declared illegal and their practices and discourses became definitively disqualified into what we could regard as “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault 2003: 7), that is to say, as visions belonging to a non-scientific realm which makes them illegitimate for the commonsensical reasoning on the politics of conflict in Lebanon. In 1991 the general amnesty law declared that they were not directly responsible for any of the crimes committed during the war; therefore, the former militias members’ voices have survived in a sort of ban. Banned into a realm of sombre war memories, they are not voices that can easily become public because of the remaining sectarian and political feuds in the

society; however, because of the amnesty law, these histories cannot be systematically silenced by the state because they imply no crime and no responsibility.

One task of this study has been to speak about the war of Lebanon through an anti-geopolitical eye, that is to say adopting a counter-perspective to the commonly accepted vision of Lebanon in the scripts of official foreign policy. The anti-geopolitical eye of this thesis, however, attempts to avoid producing further geopolitical truths, finally substituting the accepted script. This genealogical study of the 1975-1976 war has retrieved counter-perspectives to the commonly accepted scripts of official geopolitics. This retrieval – a genealogical research which implied tracing the impact of geopolitical scripts in their daily actualization through the oral histories of their protagonists – revealed gaps, non-compliant elaborations, resistances and all sorts of hybrid re-elaborations of formal discourses of foreign policy.

More generally, this thesis has questioned the distinction between the representations of the space of Lebanon elaborated in the circles of international foreign policy and their interpretation and re-enactment in non-state – therefore non-legitimate, according to the view of international foreign policy – knowledges of the urban militias. Questioning this assumed boundary implies adopting a vision of power as multisided and creative, rather than originating from a unique source and imposing top-down without the possibility for active reinterpretation. Once we adopt this view of power as creative rather than constraining, it will be possible to appreciate the way in which logics of power and logics of resistance are mutually interlocked in contextual specificities. As Foucault has argued “rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality” we need to “analy[se] power relations through the antagonism of strategies” and “in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations” (Foucault 1980: 329). The divide between the internal logic of power, and the resistance to it, however, is not a polarizing one. These knowledges did not directly enter the maps of global politics, but they changed the daily life of the Lebanese for almost two decades as well as the built fabric of Beirut. They also allow us to better appreciate the urban complexity of the Lebanese conflict, a complexity that can tell us more about contemporary urban wars and the politics of their geopolitical representation.

As I highlighted in the beginning of the study, there is a risk of operating a simple rescaling of conflict from the national to the urban that can have the effect of normalizing urban war as a postmodern “common condition. For this reason I have emphasized how what Graham – building on Appadurai (1996) – has recently called “the implosion of global and national politics into the urban” (2004c: 7), was present in Beirut from the first months of fighting in 1975. Building critically on this point, I widened the perspective of urban geopolitics beyond post-Cold War conflicts and to explore the meshing of different scales in the city before the era of “new wars”. The militias referred to different scales during the civil war and in their present description of it, incessantly redefining Lebanon’s role in the U.S./U.S.S.R. rivalry, in the Arab/Israeli conflict, and in the Lebanese/Pan-Arab tension and repeating these visions amidst the urban environment. The case of Beirut has shown that contemporary, as well as older, urban conflicts can be better interpreted if we apply a qualitative perspective on the networked configuration of “architectures of enmity”– that is to say of connections between multiple scales (cities, states, non-state actors and so on) that are conceived within the imaginative geographies of governments as well as of non-governmental bodies – than a structural one about the division of political reality on different, separated scales. This way, it is possible to explore urban war not exclusively as a sign of a determined geopolitical culture (the Cold War, the post-Cold War disorder etc.) or as a scalar phenomenon, but rather as the continuously produced spatial specification of open-ended struggle over geography for the affirmation of different and contested visions of the world. Through partition, destruction, possession and attack on the built environment, the militias also reproduced meanings about territory, nation, and identity.

The discourses of geopower expressed through the materiality of the built fabric did not subsist in isolation from the dominant geopolitical knowledge. On the contrary, these two knowledges together contributed to shape the spaces of the war in Beirut in which the militia used the rhetoric ideas and representation of space of the official foreign policy positions on the Lebanese war. These spaces of convergence between different geopolitical knowledges included specific portions of the built environment in Beirut such as the Holiday Inn or the neighbourhood of Ayn al Rummana. These sites act as the point of encounter of multiple ways to represent Lebanon geopolitically where new spatial meanings are created through violent action on materiality.

A number of works (Hyndman 2005; Jeffrey 2007; Megoran 2007, among others) have dedicated attention to the non-textual expressions of the impact of geopolitical scripts on various realms of everyday practices in non-official settings. These studies have engaged with the implications of geopolitical discourse meant in a broader, daily sense that includes popular sites of interpretation of global politics in localized dynamics. Adaptation, non-compliance, rejection or re-interpretation of official geopolitical narratives is what political geography can investigate by looking at language, embodiment and materiality (Thrift 2000: 380-387) as producing geopolitical meaning.

In this thesis, the individual histories and unofficial power discourses of the urban frontlines in Beirut complemented the official accounts of official foreign policy in my exploration of the production and elaboration of geopolitical meanings during the guerrilla warfare. The study has shown how the international community viewed the militias as external to the Lebanese normative political process and, therefore, non-accountable in the dominant geopolitical knowledge. Instead those same unofficial actors re-elaborated dominant geopolitical scripts to adapt them to their own logics of power within the urban fight; the built environment was a constitutive component of this re-elaboration of geopolitical scripts.

Trying to elude nation-state omniscience, I investigated different geographies from those produced on the basis of a state-centric division of the world. Giving space to other possible geo-graphs, I chose to focus on the urban war and on the street level practices that produced geopolitical meanings using the urban built fabric. The various products of these dynamics, such as Beirut's division into shifting and increasingly fragmented communitarian sectors, the movement of the frontlines, the hotspots of the battles are determinant aspects of the urban history of Beirut and of the imagination of itself in the world. The militia geopolitical cultures have shown, in other words, how national, international and sub-national (or urban) scales mesh in their localized geographical specification.

Urbicide: The Material and Discursive Reworking Of Urban Space Through Violence

The study addresses the connections between practices of political violence and the urban built forms in the context of a war that precedes the end of the Cold War and an era of supposedly new wars, of which urbicide is often labelled as a main feature.

A first general conclusion in this regard is that the attack to the built fabric in Beirut was at once tactical and political: it was not purely material, a repeatable mechanical act dictated by military necessity and shaping the city only in its concrete infrastructure, but being enacted regardless of the socio-political meanings underpinning the fight. However, it was not even simply the index of purely political ideals floating free of the presence of any materiality supporting it and shaping its spatial specifications. Both these visions do not appreciate sufficiently the specific grounded complexity around the actions and events that induced and constituted the attacks. Acts of violence against the built environment in Beirut were shaped by both the contingency of guerrilla tactics and the conceptualization of political and geopolitical discourses.

Urbicide – as the terrain of negotiation between object and meaning, between built form and political idea, between materiality and transparency – constituted the terrain where the lived spatiality of the city was attacked to be re-signified. Urbicide, therefore, is both material and imagined space, a geographical struggle that happens immanently through the urban forms rather than unfolding on them like against a background, or a material shell, or in the name of them, as pure symbols.

In this sense, the civil war was a “struggle over geography” perpetrated through the material fabric for the redefinition of the idea and of the territory of Lebanon. Through the territorial partition of Beirut and through the violence perpetrated against its built environment, the militias produced new spaces of representation of the nation-state. European modernity has produced not only new social subjects and new ways of envisioning space at one precise point in the colonial past, but continued to reproduce them during the civil war. Modern colonial taxonomies of the sect and its territorial representations were reproduced in the built fabric of Beirut, through its destruction and its reworking.

I would like to conclude this work with some remarks about the mutual shaping of the built environment and the opening of new lived spaces of political change in Beirut. In

order to do this, I will bring the example of a specific episode of activism in the wake of the events that followed the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri in February 2005. In December 2005, on the last days of my fieldwork, a small number of Lebanese young people staged a sit-in at the Barakat building (Figures 15 and 16). Today, the ruined façade of the building stands as a reminder of the urban geo-graphing during the civil war. The sit-in lasted through the Christmas season and was organized by a movement called *shabāb kha`if `ala al watan* (the youth fearing for the homeland). The sit-in started with a few people who sat on the pavement, issuing a number of written leaflet communiqués in Arabic, and became more organized around the end of the month when the protesters equipped themselves with tables and chairs. *shabāb kha`if `ala al watan* protested against what they reputed to be an excess of voices – from within and from outside Lebanon – and against the lack of effectiveness in the attempts to resolve Lebanon’s impasse. One of the banners at the sit-in recited: “Remember... getting your strength from the outside and entrenching behind the sects, where did it make us end up?” This admonition refers to the situation preceding the beginning of the 1975-1990 civil war. The protesters believed that the political circumstances and the excess of statements and formulas for Lebanon, together with the entrenchment of the internal politicians behind sectarian identities, could give way to the repeating of the circumstances that led to the 1975-1991 civil war. This was a protest with hardly a high resonance apart from some echoes over the web⁷⁷ but, in my view, this episode is an example of the centrality of the built environment in creating spaces for political change and of its constitutive role – rather than a background role – in conveying political meanings and messages. The built environment is an active component in the constitution of the encounter between the normative rhetoric of governmental political discourse and the subjugated, de-legitimated political narratives of resistance and reinterpretation that generate the potential for political change. But the built environment is also geopolitical, as it is constitutive of the reproduction of meanings about the nation, the state and its role in the world.

⁷⁷ [www.tymat.org/?q=node/133&size= original](http://www.tymat.org/?q=node/133&size=original). Page accessed on 23 December 2007.



Figure 15 and 16. Spontaneous sit-in at the Barakat building. The banner says “Remember... getting your strength from the outside and entrenching behind the sects, where did it make us end up?” Source: photograph by the author, Beirut, December 2005.

It is crucial to remark that the use of this portion of the built environment to perform alternative political narratives to the institutional power overlaps with the already existent spatial narratives belonging to the memory of this place as a landmark of war. The Barakat building and its set of meanings for the political history of the city (and of the whole country) have, therefore, been re-enacted in order to deliver a political statement of change.

The re-enactment of war memory as a political message through the Barakat building, triggers ideas for further research seeking to understand how the memory of war can be transmitted and reproduced in the context of the contemporary political events in Lebanon. Memory and myths travelled from the conflicts of nineteenth century Mount Lebanon into the 1975-1990 civil war in the form of legends and other forms of oral histories (Corm 2005). It would be useful to understand whether and how same or different mechanisms of transmission have been enacted to transmit the memory of the civil war to the contemporary situation, and how past discourses of friendship, enmity, identity and difference, as well as notions of belonging, leadership, heroism and so on, are currently performed in Lebanon.

This aspect triggers a second question for further study about the possible ways to combine research about past events – which might rely mainly on written and visual documents from institutional archives – with the efforts in critical political geography to adopt non-textual approaches (Hyndman 2006; Megoran 2007; Thrift 2000). This question can lead us to engage with issues of memory and the daily sites where memory of past events is performed and reproduces meanings about geo-power, state, sovereignty and national identity. In the Lebanese case, I believe that more research is needed on the topic of the memory of war and its non-textual expressions, for example commemoration, the use of garments, gadgets and other embodied practices, as well as the practices of leisure and consumption.

Michel Foucault, once argued

it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other". (2000: 356)

The Barakat building, in other words, is not the background of the message; it *is* part of the message. In Beirut, the built environment has been an active component in generating discourses about state power and about resistance to it. Beirut's buildings have been the product of, but also the tools for, the enactment of these dialectics of power and resistance. Here is where urbicide, the deliberate attempt to change spatial discourses through destruction, shows itself as part of the open-ended geo-graphing, of the physical and discursive re-definition of politics in and through the built environment and the everyday material and discursive experience of the city.

Decolonizing Lebanon's Political Space And The Certainty Of The Sect

The second implication of my work for the studies of the political geography of Lebanon regards the ways in which the logic of sectarianism overlapped with the territoriality of the militias in Beirut.

This study has revealed the deep implications between colonialism, modern territoriality and the social production of sectarianism in Lebanon. These implications generated two, only apparently contradictory, imaginaries of the nation state of Lebanon: the imaginary of the refuge for religious and political tolerance and that of the battleground of religious feuds. These imaginaries – which were recalled in the discourses of international foreign policy during the civil war – are both the product of the modern certainty that there actually exist – since millennia – discrete and predetermined sectarian identities in Lebanon.

Since the nineteenth century, European imperial powers – England and France primarily, but also Russia and Austria – U.S. cultural and religious missions and the Vatican employed the idea of sect as a device to shape modern conceptions of subjecthood. Besides being a laboratory of modernity, the sect was also a colonial laboratory of territoriality, as it was employed as a unit around which the map of Lebanon was shaped since the 1840s and on which – ultimately – political representation and the formation of the nation-state were based. Sectarianism in Lebanon has been very much about the distribution of population onto a space considered as geometric and neutral. But – most importantly – the territorial modernity of the sect resides in the fact that these new political boundaries were traced on a space

conceived as void of any agency and social relationships already in place. The modernity of the sect consists in having modified the way of conceiving difference in Lebanon: from relationships based on loyalty, descent and proximity in which religious belonging was an accepted aspect of differentiation internal to social groups, a new system of representing difference – difference as external as something separated from the social group – gradually took shape, in which relationships were based on sect, belonging by birth, and territoriality.

By arguing that the sect is a social and political production of colonial modernity that has become an all-encompassing representational structure for the meaning of Lebanon as a nation state, it is not my intention to negate the very real and material effects that the idea of sect has had in Lebanon since the 1840s: for example, three major (in 1840, 1860, 1975-1990) and one ‘minor’ (1958) civil wars, a sectarian division of state powers, and the pervasiveness of sectarian structures in the Lebanese everyday life, work, education and so on, not to speak of the material effects that sectarianism has left in the urban fabric of Beirut after the war. How could we say that the sect is a pure construction, in light of all these concrete consequences? The sect, on the contrary, appears as extremely real if we look at its everyday effects. Nevertheless, the cause (for example, belonging to a sect) should not be confused with the effect (for example, destroying a building): the sect should be seen a way of thinking more than a reality in itself, and we have seen where and how this way of thinking originated during colonial modernity, and how it was made a fixed representation of how the Lebanese society should be.

The sect became the discourse through which the Lebanese society could be represented. This type of representation has been and is still reproduced by the Lebanese themselves. The modernity of the sect consists in having produced a structure of sectarian definition of identity that is conceived as immutable and external from society and from politics, something like an innate ‘nature’ of the Lebanese society.

As we have seen, one of the main legacies of Cartesian modernity has been that of creating orders of representation and having made these orders appear as “a framework that seems to precede and exist apart from the actual individuals and objects ordered. The framework, appearing as something pre-existent, non-material and non-spatial seems to constitute a separate, metaphysical realm – the realm of the ‘conceptual’”

(Mitchell 1991: 176). The Lebanese sectarian order has become, therefore, a conceptual structure conceived as existing separately from the social process.

Lebanon is still immersed in the certainty of a sectarian representation of itself; it continues to exhibit itself to the world as sectarian. Because of this certainty, and of the political legitimacy with which it invests the sect – Lebanon remains haunted by violence, perpetrated for the redefinition of the power balance of the sects. Scholars have noted that a great part of the contemporary studies of Lebanon proceed from the same assumption: the actual existence of the sect as an eternal and immutable entity that pre-exists society or that is generated independently from webs of power immanent to society. A post-colonial perspective on the Lebanese history would instead contribute to question the specific and localised processes whereby sectarianism and its political and spatial translations have been produced, the relations of these translations with Lebanon's contemporary history and how – ultimately – these relationships can be modified.

It is in questioning the ethics and politics of the territorial order of the sect and in the naturalization of this order (embodied in the electoral law, the mapping of the electoral districts and all the practices of sectarian everyday boundary making), rather than in finding the “right” balance of power between sects, or in interpreting Lebanon's politics only in reference to wider geopolitical schemes, that the key to interpreting Lebanon's recurring violence can be found. It is in tracing down and in questioning the relationships that compose the power structure of the sect, rather than focusing on the circumstances *within* that same structure, that critical research on Lebanon should and must engage.

It is extremely important, especially in light of the recent resurgence of various occasions for political violence in the country, to adopt a critical genealogical perspective on the Lebanese political process and to the study of that process. A genealogical approach is intended here in a Foucaultian sense, one that involves continuous confrontation of commonsensical political and geo-political knowledges about the coexistence and relations between different sects, with the less accepted or visible absences, resistances, non-compliances and contested histories of the development of the sectarian modern imagination and its contemporary expression. Contrapuntal readings of Lebanese political spaces are needed in order to re-appropriate

the alternative possibilities to the all-encompassing structure of sectarianism, re-appropriating the spaces in which an alternative to the sectarian territoriality can be created and opening up the structure of the sect in order to create new spaces of political dialogue.

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- Kata'ib former fighter, 22 November 2005, Beirut. Tape in possession of author.
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